

PhD. 28418

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A Musical Souvenir:  
London in 1829

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A thesis submitted to the University of Cambridge  
in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2005





## NOTES

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This thesis is my own work and contains nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration with others, except as specified in the text and Acknowledgements. The text conforms to the stipulations set out by the Board of Graduate Studies and the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge: 'not to exceed 80,000 words for the Ph.D. Degree excluding notes, appendices, bibliographies, musical transcriptions and examples'. Titles of periodicals, while they may be abridged in the main text, appear in full in the footnotes. When translations are mine, the original has been reproduced alongside the English. Every reasonable effort has been made to contact the copyright holders of the images reproduced in this document.

## ABSTRACT

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This thesis involves a 'thick description' of music and musical representation in a single year: 1829. The context for the study is London, although the city has been approached less as a metropolitan than as a cosmopolitan centre, a global capital with global significance. This is a cultural history of music presented as a montage of case studies formed around musical events. Cases have been selected both with the general contrast of the group and the variety of musical types available to the description in mind (concert music, or major and minor theatrical forms). The potential of each event to have meaning beyond itself (to be representative) has been a third consideration, since cases are discussed in terms of broader historical, political and cultural flows. Newspapers, playbills, manuscript scores, almanacs, handbills, memoirs, journals, diaries and other ephemera have been used both to locate and frame evidence. The montage of cut-outs, in other words, forms an ensemble of partial histories, a picture of the intricately textured life of musical London.

Cases are as follows: the final performances of a castrato analysed in terms of the emergence of the biological sciences and shifts in the history of the voice; a danced Beethoven symphony discussed in terms of ballet and concert trends; a colonial melodrama dealt with from the perspective of the postcolonial critic; an exploration of how new ways of imagining the city relate to new ways of imagining symphonic discourse; female duet-singing approached in light of psychoanalysis and gender studies; and the exchange of a musical annual looked at in view of the anthropology and philosophy of the gift. The use of the appellation 'A Musical Souvenir' in the title gestures towards the emergence of the 'music-annual form' in 1829, and – related to this – an emerging awareness of what I call 'year-historical situatedness'.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This thesis grew out of a Masters dissertation completed in 2001. It is fair to say that I would not have chosen the subject that I eventually did without a clear grasp of the richness and potential of sources this dissertation opened up to me. The raw material encountered in newspapers, playbills, concert programmes and periodicals relating to London's musical life of the 1820s and 30s remains prodigious and untapped. I hope that I have provided a glimpse of what might be possible were this archive of ephemera better catalogued and made sense of. Lingerings from this Masters research are a good part of the third chapter (now abridged and reworked on the basis of new findings) and the biography appearing in the first appendix (also updated).

If this thesis has merit, it is largely owed to the supervisor of this dissertation, Roger Parker. He is in fact the imagined reader behind much of the text. I thank him for his open-mindedness, and for all those interesting references to the neutering bite of wild boars, the history of hypnotism, and the finer points of human-skin lampshades.

There are others who have been equally encouraging. The Association of Commonwealth Universities and the British Council supported me financially. Cambridge proved well suited to the research at hand being close to London and stocked with libraries. Gonville and Caius College provided a lively intellectual community, an excellent library, money for conference attendance, an introduction to rowing, and (most importantly) all-hour access to functioning computers. Endless trips to Rare Books, Microfilms, Periodicals, Inter-Library Loans, South Front Six and the Anderson Room made me one of the regulars at the Cambridge University Library; a big thank you to the staff for putting up with my orderings and reorderings. The Faculty of Music supported my visit to the 2003 meeting of the American Musicological Society in Houston. The librarians of the Pendlebury in the Faculty were friendly and helpful. My proximity to London meant frequent journeys to the Theatre Museum (National Museum of the Performing Arts) in Covent Garden, the print room of The Victoria and Albert Museum, The British Library at St Pancras, The Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Public Records Office in Kew, British Library Newspapers at Colindale, Guildhall Library, the City of Westminster

Archives and Senate House Library, University of London. I would like to thank all these institutions for their assistance.

Of the late-night chats, I remember those with Jon Conlin, Alex Bremner, Wim Weymans, Nishlyn Ramanna and Jonathan Noble; they will no doubt recognise their contributions in what follows. W. Dean Sutcliffe supervised my Masters dissertation, tried to calm my prose style, and generally got me into the business. Ludmilla Jordanova and the CRASSH interdisciplinary discussion group provided a forum for debate and exploration. Karen Henson commented helpfully on early versions of the 'Introduction'. Christina Fuhrmann shared her work on English opera. Louis-Antoine Prat kindly granted permission to reproduce his Delacroix. Lawrence Kramer edited the text of my second chapter in anticipation of its appearance as 'Dancing the Symphonic: Beethoven-Bochsa's *Symphonie Pastorale*', in *19th-Century Music* 27/1 (2003). A colloquium given by Alessandra Campana caused me to follow up a lead that later became important to the section on castrati. Equally helpful was Carolyn Abbate, who sent me a generous package of primary research, which I hope to tackle properly some day. Emanuele Senici, Mary Ann Smart and Heather Hadlock commented on 'Velluti in Speculum: the twilight of the castrato' in anticipation of a forthcoming article in *Cambridge Opera Journal* (I have not done full justice to their suggestions here). Lucia Ruprecht enriched those sections involving dancers, and corrected some of my German. Yvonne Pollitt and Olivier Simonin had a look at my French; the Cambridge Language Centre also had a hand in addressing my dearth of linguistic skills.

Closer to home, my parents provided endless support; three years ago, my mother bought me a computer upon which every word of this thesis was typed. Closest are my family: Shell.b copy-edited the final draft, talked through difficult points, fed me, and put up with me in moments of panic; Thea, the real achievement of the period, set the whole twisted wreck of words in the light of Eternity.

For all the errors, carelessness, excesses, over-elaborations and omissions, all the above have amnesty. I only am to blame.

# INTRODUCTION

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## The historic order

The first stage in this undertaking will be to carry over the principle of montage to history. That is, to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event .... To grasp the construction of history as such. In the structure of commentary. The refuse of history.

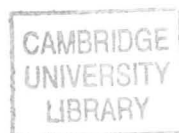
Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

This thesis involves a 'thick description' of music and musical representation in a single year: 1829. The context for the study is London, although the city has been approached less as a metropolitan than as a cosmopolitan centre, a global capital with global significance. This is a cultural history of music presented as a montage of case studies formed around musical events. Cases have been selected both with the general contrast of the group and the variety of musical types available to the description in mind (concert music, or major and minor theatrical forms). The potential of each event to have meaning beyond itself (to be representative) has been a third consideration, since cases are discussed in terms of broader historical, political and cultural flows. The montage of cut-outs, in other words, forms an ensemble of partial histories, a picture of the intricately textured life of musical London.

The challenge has been to select cases that would consciously reinvent smooth or familiar approaches to music history. A series of radically unfamiliar events chosen, the idea is to rub history against the grain, to test epochal truths. This thesis in fact sets out to present a collage of historical cul-de-sacs, non-events, accidents, fragments, failures, stranded episodes, alternative stories. In the way it tears at the fabric of the inherited past, it seeks to be provocative: by presenting not so much a history of losers as a history of apparent inconsequentialities. To suggest an irregularly textured past is to refigure the notion that, musically speaking, 'nothing happened' in 1820s London.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 462.





I borrow the notion of 'thick description' from Clifford Geertz, who took the phrase from Gilbert Ryle and put it at the heart of his The Interpretation of Cultures (1973). In the famous introduction to this collection of essays, the anthropologist argued against reductionism. He opposed the presentation of the mute act, the structurally unified object of study cut down, dried out, shorn of context – sealed in glorious solitude. The tendency in his field at the time was to isolate (laboratory-style) in order to hold events, acts or objects of study up for endless academic scrutiny. By 'thick description', Geertz meant to denote, not the coming-together of as much data into as brief a time or space as possible; rather, he sought to locate acts, events or objects of study within their networks of framing intentions. He wanted to supply the miniature – the case study – not just with structure, but with texture – social significance. For him, to search for meaning scientifically, with a detached gaze, was unyielding. Academic practice, he argued, needed more than objectivity: it required absorption, richness, erudition, learning, 'thickness'. Significance emerges not as the result of a formal process of pairing down, but by mixing detail into detail in a rich process of open-ended accretion.<sup>2</sup>

Following Geertz, my thesis will not present 'raw facts'; the reader will not be assailed with a scrapbook of self-evident truths. There will be no attempt to 'let the data speak for itself' (as if it could), escape hermeneutics, or avoid narrative à la Gumbrecht in his In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time.<sup>3</sup> Instead, I will 'cook' my data, imagine it in layers – stir 'thickness' into every scene, and use narrative to suggest and complicate.

I mention Gumbrecht here largely because of his eminence. My Musical Souvenir will not be a snapshot history or 'history of simultaneities' in the radical style he expounds. Gumbrecht's annual report famously assembles a hotchpotch of historical scenes from a single year and links them as one would link internet sites. The reader is exhorted to begin at any point in the book and to 'read as far as your interest carries you (and as long as your schedule allows)'.<sup>4</sup> Gumbrecht's method here hinges on his observation that the past of today is not what it used to be. He

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<sup>2</sup> Lévi-Strauss makes a useful distinction between scientific and what he calls 'mythic' methods of analysis: '[The bricoleur] builds up structures by fitting together events, or rather the remains of events, while science, 'in operation' simply by virtue of coming into being, creates its means and results in the form of events, thanks to the structures which it is constantly elaborating and which are its hypotheses and theories'; see Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (La Pensée Sauvage) (London, 1962), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., ix.

argues that there is good reason why today's undergraduates have no desire to 'learn from history', to be taught by it. All these young minds want is to experience history – as they do one-night stands, ecstasy pills and fried chicken. They want performances of history; a kind of textual simulacrum of the past in which to immerse themselves. Anything didactic or 'teachy' will only be flinched at. Since narrative history is no longer interesting or worthwhile, the only way to keep the past alive is to reinvent it as a site for tourism. What is paramount in the age of reality TV is the illusion of 'being-in-the-past'; readers seek history without narrative, without its petty moral tone. Gumbrecht's notion, no doubt, is appealing, radical and à la Benjamin, but I struggle to see the point of history shorn of storytelling. To me, this is all a bit 1980s: Spielberg, virtual reality, Perestroika, amnesia, and Fukuyama's 'end of history'. Has modernity so triumphed that even stories are to be sacrificed on the altar of rationalism? 'Effective historians' today (to borrow Foucault's term) are people within the hegemony who are forced to remind our culture that we do not live in vacuum – in the Eternal Now of Fortress Europe or North America. Even these Utopias are tainted with temporalities, histories, folktales, ancestries, movements, prophecies, myths, futures. Today's 'inevitable culture' needs to be resisted, not entertained.

So: where this study differs most strikingly from Gumbrecht's is in its insistence not on static moments, but on moving scenes, quasi-musical 'instances'. The chapters take the form of 'video-clip' histories; not grand narratives but petites histoires – stretches of 'significant time' that unfold and then end. A window opens in the 1820s where art was prone to this: dioramas shifted and stopped before continuing again; ballet involved registering a pose and gracefully segueing into another; prose texts began to be punctuated with lithographs that arrested the narrative momentarily; music was set out as a series of interrelated movements. A strong sense of switching in and out of significance was in play. This stop-start pattern was more than merely fashion – it betrayed a particular way of encountering the world; a way of ordering space within time, time within space. Meaning was perceived to be generated in these procedures, procedures which, in micro-historicist terms, recognized the fluidity of context.

A central claim in this thesis is that music mediates in the social (re)production of national, cosmopolitan, domestic and civic subjectivity – and, in a related way, that it acts in the performance of community (self) and cultural

difference (other). Questions may be raised as to the validity of this assertion. What kind of historical evidence is music? Is it even significant in the greater scheme of things? Are music's accoutrements – scores, performers, listeners, instruments – really critical to the 'way things were'? History, in its traditional sense, emerges from the scrutiny of parliamentary reports, the diaries of Kings, governmental archives, church records, etc. According to this purview, scores may have their special place – their own libraries; music may run along its own secluded historical path – Beethoven begat Czerny begat Liszt. But who would say that music has changed the course of history, stopped wars, affected politics, steered trends, altered the way people were? Musicologists stick to what they know for good reason: music is no mover and shaker in the world. It may be different, ineffable, a special case, something to be enjoyed, an embellishment of the scene: it may have its own particular autonomy. But music is not to be overvalued; it sticks to its own very special sphere of operation.

Or does it? Increasingly, historians find themselves drawn to writing histories of phenomena once thought immutable: sentiments, emotions, instincts, sexualities, mentalities, bodies, illnesses, psychologies, conversation, politeness, natural objects, gravity, glass, food and so on. Music, because of its relation to cultural performance (to enactments of the self) is at last breaking out of the once airtight enclosure of musicology: that shut cell of specialized study. At last, music is becoming properly historical – truly relevant to the conditions of the past. Any musical event occurs as an instance of 'significant time' – by it, culture is 'turned up on the dial' (if you will). Here before us – in the music – we have a social procedure, an aural regimen through which whole bodies, whole psychologies, have passed. An acoustic disciplining has taken place (accounting for music's sense of 'presence' – its metaphysics – not the metaphysics of the always-already, but of a body that once occupied it). The music survives as the cultural remnant of an act of absorption, recording a bygone historical instance in rigorous temporal detail. More and more, if any evidence, any trace preserves 'the way life was', then that evidence might just as well be musical.

It is probably already apparent that, as far as mainstream musicology is concerned, I have shifted the object of analysis. The Music Itself, the pure abstraction, the first Truth, the essential performance-that-never-was: none of these really concern this thesis. Traditional musicology, in any case, rarely addressed music as music: as the aural-temporal phenomenon we know it to be. The score, the notation,

the visual remainder, the static ideal, the leftover in the archive, the identity of the work, the *Wunderursprung* was always its 'be all and end all'. An expanded view of this object of study is now overdue. The idea that music can only be studied visually as a score is no longer binding; sound can hardly be said to occur outside of its actuation. Better to address music as an act, not only heard, but seen, felt, lived, experienced; which is not to say music has a life of its own; rather that it is given life, used, performed into existence (why should I need to tell you what music is?). Nothing aural occurs without bodies in motion, without sounding form, without performance. A host of evidence – aural as well as text-visual – survives to record the musical moment for posterity: scores, reviews, instruments, their sound, venues, programmes, tutors, treatises, traditions. Music history, after all, is no longer simply the equivalent of a chronological series of works. Nor does it refer narrowly to a collection of biographies, significant lives, linking one composer to another. Rather, and more intricately, the musical past is a jumble of acts – a sky-high pile of cast-off moments (bearing some or other musical relation), thousands and thousands of them, some well documented, others not, all awaiting historical treatment.

This thesis will not try to present the full picture (what Lévi-Strauss called 'the total system'). There will be no attempt to imagine a single ontology for music, a 'general theory of listening practice' or some unitary idea of musical life in London in 1829. Rather, several overlapping, parallel and partial accounts of the same historical scene will suffice, since the total picture can never be fully captured or systematized. This study, then, is inadequate – it falls short, failing as a *thesis* in the Hegelian sense of the word. But this failure is unavoidable. Absolute History (as we know) is a myth resting on a past without holes; its project is to reduce the diversity of time into an entirety fully enclosed upon itself. In the absence of faith in what Nietzsche called Monumental History, I take solace in Geertz: 'Not all Cretans are liars, and it is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something'.<sup>5</sup> My hope is to evoke something of what Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher call the 'intriguing enigmas' of the time and place I have chosen to study. Ezra Pound spoke about 'the method of Luminous Detail', whilst Foucault wrote about the archive in which '[things] shine, as it were, like stars, some that seem close to us shining brightly from afar off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing

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<sup>5</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), 20.

pale'.<sup>6</sup> This thesis will have done its job if, during its course, a few little or unknown events shine out better in the darkness of our musical cosmology (to borrow the Pound-Foucault metaphor). Since 'the life-world of 1829' (as a German scholar might call it) is irrecoverable, since we can never establish 'the way things were', any brief luminescence will be pleasing. In more ambitious moments, this study will work for the unforeseen, the brief 'speaking through' of radically unfamiliar events, or what Greenblatt and Gallagher famously called 'the touch of the Real'.<sup>7</sup>

#### **'From annalisation to annualisation'<sup>8</sup>**

Year-studies have become increasingly common in recent Anglo-American scholarship. The trend began in Literary Studies nearly thirty years ago at the University of Essex. Between 1976 and 1982, four conferences were held there under the general rubric: 'The Sociology of Literature'. 1848, 1936, 1642 and 1789 were picked out for discussion. Raymond Williams contributed to the first of these 'annual reports' with a paper now famously entitled 'Forms of Fiction in 1848' which re-emerged later in *Writing and Society* (1983). Memorably, he introduced his topic – in a now familiarly self-reflexive or postmodern style – by addressing the significance of the first WH Smith railway station bookstore, which had recently opened in England. Book-length surveys such as Carl Dawson's *Victorian Noon: English Literature in 1850* (1979), Rebecca West's *1900* (1982), Richard Stein's *Victoria's Year: English Literature and Culture, 1837–1838* (1987) and Denis Hollier's *New Harvard History of French Literature*, designed as a constellation of year-studies, followed. In France, Jean Starobinski's classic *1789, The Emblems of Reason* (1973) predated all of these efforts, and caused a stir when it appeared in English in 1982. By the 1990s, Anglo-American scholarship saw the translation of Kittler's influential dual-year survey, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, Gumbrecht's radically anti-narrative *In 1926*

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London, 2000), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practising New Historicism* (Chicago, 2000). My use of a light metaphor recalls Meyer Howard Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York, 1953). If poststructuralists famously do away with History (they see it as fiction through and through), then New Historicists only barely perceive its truth. For them, history has this pale, enigmatic, touching quality. The attitude taken towards it is an attitude of nostalgia, a teary sentimentalism characterises this asking-after of accidents, cul-de-sacs, little nodes of feeling in the archive. The new historicist enters the past in much the same way as the Romantic scholar, as though it were a field of mysticism and phantoms, where he gropes at scraps, signs of life. Unlike the poststructuralists, however, he at least believes there is something there, that something vaguely recoverable exists in the always-already. The past is locatable and it can be grasped, if only for a moment.

<sup>8</sup> I have borrowed this subtitle from James Chandler, *England in 1819* (Chicago, 1998), 74.



(1997), Richard Cronin's editing of the collection of essays 1798: The Year of the Lyrical Ballads (1998), and the publication of James Chandler's magisterial and supremely self-conscious England in 1819 (1998).<sup>9</sup>

In terms of historiographic trends, what these apparently unrelated studies herald is not the displacement of the much-maligned grand narrative by a revolutionary technique founded on historical minutiae. Rather, they seem to multiply the same unpopular practice of general history on much finer levels: a simple diminution of scale. Described as such – as traditional history in quick-time – the new historiography appears less than momentous. But this would be misleading. Its old-hat methods notwithstanding, new historiography in practice has achieved nothing less, I would argue, than the steady redefinition of our sense of historical situatedness. To begin to explain this development, I need to show how this miniaturised version of the past relates to the newfound frailty of such grand, abstract and nominalist concepts as 'Culture' and 'Society'.

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward.

Walter Benjamin<sup>10</sup>

Whereas in the old Structuralist model music, dance, literature and fine art were figured to reflect some aspect of a vast, slow-moving super-structure – most often called 'Culture' or 'Society' – the arts are now seen to perform or mediate these

<sup>9</sup> See Literature, Politics and Theory: Papers from the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, 1976–84, ed. Francis Barker et al. (London, 1986); Carl Dawson, Victorian Noon: English Literature in 1850 (Baltimore, 1979); Rebecca West, 1900 (New York, 1982); Jean Starobinski, 1789: The Emblems of Reason, 2 vols. (Charlottesville, 1982); Richard Stein, Victoria's Year: English Literature and Culture, 1837–1838 (Oxford, 1987); Denis Hollier, A New Harvard History of French Literature (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Friedrich Kittler, Discourse-Networks 1800/1900, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford, Calif., 1990) and 1789: The Year of the Lyrical Ballads, ed. Richard Cronin (New York, 1998). Penelope Hughes-Hallett, The Immortal Dinner. A Famous Evening of Genius and Laughter in Literary London, 1817 (London, 2000) takes the miniaturising trend even further, by reconstructing an evening at the Lisson Grove studio of historical painter, Benjamin Haydon, with Charles Lamb, Joseph Ritchie, John Keats and William Wordsworth in attendance.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', in Illuminations, Hannah Arendt, ed., trans. Harry Zohn (London, 1992), 245–55, 249. Perhaps I use Benjamin's enigmatic 1940s words irreverently (written just before his suicide). But, dealing in smallness – in the 'uneventful' past – is an approach pioneered by Benjamin via his 'undialectical' materialism. My Lumpensammler (scavenger) method would no doubt be impossible without his precedent.

concepts themselves. Representational forms take on a new importance, and define each other in a relative system Adorno called an 'homology' of historical attractions. In the new regime, culture and society differ as much at various points in their history as their relative arts and artistic practices do. The past of today shifts at a spectacular rate of change (as Benjamin's angel understood). Societies and cultures are fast-moving as never before, redefining themselves in the historian's eye every time a new piece of music is heard, writing is read, or image seen. For the music historian, this increased pressure of the past – this piling-up of socio-cultural states – perpetuates a situation in which the business of selecting dates for study takes on an acute significance. If Music assumes a new guise at the rate of every performance, then what 'music' represents depends both on the particulars of each historical case and the mundane specifics of the two dates within which that case is held to signify. The dull operations of historical découpage – the manual work of setting limits, cutting, citing, scaling and framing evidence – becomes crucially important in the new situation. These acts of framing suddenly govern the generalisations we make when we describe what this music is and does.

Of course, any awareness of the importance of date and scale in historical writing, cynics would argue, has always been a matter of common sense. If the achievements of the new historicists are merely reducible to such everyday concerns as datedness and eventfulness – to mere shifts in scale – in what sense can their claims be said to be 'new'? Is the shrinking of the historian's code, this indulgence in abbreviated history, really only traceable to the recent past? Does it not evolve earlier than the appearance of such micro-studies as Williams' 1848? Even in the notoriously slow-moving field of Historical Musicology grand schemes like 'European Music', 'Romantic Music' or 'The Age of Beethoven' have seemed unlikely for some time. Is the popularity of the year study not merely the symptom of a general trend, begun decades ago?

To respond to these questions: there seems to be a finer point to annualisation than the mere downsizing of historical range. The 'radical' movements of the so-called 'return to history' may have long since been anticipated by the decline of long-breathed annalisms. But I would argue that the arrival at this particular point – the position of 'yearness' – registers an important moment in the history of historical writing. This place of rest, this dealing in units, appears to me to be significant. History – a language of memory – as Levi-Strauss (1962) pointed out, speaks almost

exclusively in terms of chronology. 'There is no history', he wrote in The Savage Mind, 'without dates', or, more pointedly, in this sense, without the possibility of a date:

The code consists in chronology.... [The historian] reduces [history] to an emaciated body, the skeleton of which is formed by dates.... Dates may not be the whole of history, nor what is most interesting about it, but they are its sine qua non, for history's entire originality and distinctive nature lie in apprehending the relation between before and after, which would perforce dissolve if its terms could not, at least in principle, be dated.<sup>11</sup>

Gumbrecht underwrote Levi-Strauss' position some forty years later. History is no longer what it was, Gumbrecht argues, because it is no longer plausible to imagine a single heroic human subject, a 'lowest common denominator', roving through history. The past has altered because the individual is no longer himself: under modernity, he is decentred, ever-changing, nugatory – in fact 'historical' himself. Because of the absence of an indivisible subject in the past, history is left to its own devices: its practices, tools, techniques. Without his verification – his presence – only the discourse speaks. The power of historical practice to reveal, evidently, has outgrown the power of the subject to perceive – human perception is not rigorous enough for historical reality. All that is left to modernity are leftovers: the discipline's machinery of numbers, scales, quantities, sequences, catalogues, archives. The discourse alone survives to tell the truth about history.

### **The case of the date**

So, does Levi-Strauss' view that history registers its meaning in the manner of its categorisation – and specifically in the grammar of the date – explain my own adoption of a year-specific approach to music history? To answer this question, I first need to explain, in terms of my own situatedness, how the case of 1829 shifts briefly into view at this time, and how dealing with it becomes conceivable. New Materialists (such as myself) increasingly operate in a sphere where, having eschewed the fullness of a total history, they do business with nuts and bolts. That the trade in dates and cases presides over the urge to flesh things out is a result, I think, not only of the familiar self-conscious obsession with historical method, but of a 'new' sense that history-making is in progress – that histories are being made. This

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<sup>11</sup> Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind, 258.



is a crucial concern for the current climate: that history is not merely papering over the gaps bequeathed to it by its annalising forefather, or rehearsing well-established claims, but that it is reinventing itself from scratch. 'The field of history is completely undetermined', Veyne announced in 1971, 'except that everything in it must have taken place' (this is my paraphrase of him).<sup>12</sup> In the end, it is in this sense of the 'newness' of current history-making, the feeling that anything is possible, the conviction that the mere reinterpretation of pre-existing facts is insufficient, that much of the new impulse to compile digit-histories arises. Before foundations can be laid, building blocks must be cased, dated and characterised.

Nothing betrays the neo-romanticism of this endeavour more than the fantasy that History is being reinvented. That much recent scholarship is far from 'new', that it merely involves an early nineteenth-century revival, has, of course, been frequently recognised. But how might this common, and I think valid, observation help explain a second reason why 1829 emerges as a viable frame for research? Numerous historians identify the early nineteenth century as the age of the spirit of the age: witness the young Thomas Carlyle's article, 'The Sign of the Times', which appeared in the June 1829 issue of The Edinburgh Review.<sup>13</sup> The violence of the Revolution and Napoleonic wars etched into personal memory a self-conscious appreciation for modern situatedness, which superseded 'timeless' models of eighteenth-century historicism. A perception arose, in other words, that context was, above all, conditioned by the past. Life was increasingly filtered through an awareness of the specific 'case' or 'state' of history, a development which, as Lukács argued, related to recruitment propaganda for Europe's first mass wars.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the very invention of the modern concept of the 'state' or 'nation' was founded on this newly discovered

<sup>12</sup> Paul Veyne, Comment on Écrit l'Histoire; Suivi de Foucault Révolutionne l'Histoire (Paris, 1979), 11–2.

<sup>13</sup> This classic essay was a review of three quasi-millennarianist tracts: The Last Days; or, Discourses on These Our Times, Anticipation; or, a Hundred Years Hence, and The Rise, Progress and Present State of Public Opinion in Great Britain. In this piece, Carlyle decried the dehumanising tendencies of what he called 'the present Machine-Age'. Forming a distinction between the 'science of mechanics' and that of 'dynamics', he argued for the superiority of the latter. He lamented the decline of the Metaphysical and Moral Sciences, and exalted the spiritualising and human tendencies of art, poetry and religion. A number of institutions, he noticed, had recently formed around every sphere of human existence: music, fine art, religion, science all had organisations to enact their regulation. The result was alienation: 'men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand'; see The Edinburgh Review XCVII (March 1829), 439–59, 449.

<sup>14</sup> 'The inner life of a nation is linked with the modern mass army in a way it could not have been with the absolutist armies of the earlier period'; see Georg Lukács, The Historical Novel, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London, 1962), 24.

sens d'histoire.<sup>15</sup> A modern re-ordering of both public and private spheres assigned a specific place to every citizen of the known world through the temporalisation of history and the dating of memory. Numerous comparative disciplines arose – from anthropology to ethnology to musicology – which measured, as they still often do, the particular 'forwardness' or 'backwardness' of culture. The emergence of the public museum, for example, reinforced the notion that different people lived in different 'states', related at varying degrees of 'progress', and slotted into a vast, classifying memory-bank (maintained by science) cased and dated as Natural History.

This encoding of difference by typifying case and date was played out in every part of culture. Music, for one, was narrowed around the time Lukács and Anderson discuss into what Lydia Goehr called 'work-concepts' – a reordering of musical production on the basis of case, date and situation. Melodrama, in a similar way, stock-typed music into a variety of situated modes under indications such as 'hurry', 'storm' or 'cautious'. French opera, to cite another example, moved from being appraised for grandeur, noblesse, dignité or le merveilleux in the late eighteenth century, to being reviewed in the nineteenth on the basis of its couleur locale, illusion convaincante (of a specific time and place) or for le pittoresque, exactitude or vraisemblance. Indeed the late 1820s penchant for staging dramatic actors, opera singers, ballet dancers, choral groups and other human arrangements in stop-start tableaux – in a series of frozen poses – underlined the concern for classifying bodies under casuist rubrics such as: 'an attitude of the greatest wrath' or 'an attitude of fear and alienation'.

This move to capture 'case' on ever-finer levels, as we have seen, resonates with neo-romantic trends in historiography. In fact, a strongly felt resonance across the ages, although perhaps a by-product of romantic delusion, has engendered a particular ease with the mind of the early nineteenth century. Not only does this period replay itself today in terms of new historical method, but it replicates its sense of presence by sustaining a prolific branch of cutting-edge research into its field. In my own work, I have imagined the choice of an 1829 year-study and the classifying, cutting, citing, scaling and framing of evidence that has fallen my way in a less than random way. I think it significant, for example, that a year which saw the publication

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<sup>15</sup> Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London, 1983).

of Tilt's Musical Souvenir for 1829; Bochsa's and Fitzball's The Musical Gem, a Souvenir; Burney's Musical Bijou for 1829 or Clementi's Apollo's Gift; or, the Musical Souvenir (and which depicted itself therefore as a distinctive musical case) should now be envisaged as an appropriate unit for historical research (see Chapter Six). Similarly, it does not seem insignificant that at a moment when such people as Peter Sellars direct full or semi-stagings of concert music, I should take a serious look at early staged performances of a Beethoven symphony (Chapter Three); or when the post-apartheid marketing of South Africa's image to the West is such a topical concern, I should record the melodramatic transcription of exotic space on the Imperial stage (Chapter Four). The desire to write one's own case into history – not by negotiating petty points of theory or interpretation, but by exhuming an entirely new set of facts, dates and cases – is, of course, a supremely 'romantic' desire. If these dates and cases shift briefly into view, it is because they resonate with a need to seek out similarly scaled dates and cases. To want to 'discover' history anew, in other words, is to want to grasp a strong sense of presence (a home) in the past.



Plate 1. Title page of The Musical Souvenir for 1829 (London, 1829), illustrating an anonymous setting of Mark Akenside's poem 'Cheerfulness'. One reviewer wrote: 'By an extraordinary effort we did reach the thirty-first page of this Souvenir, and shall not forget what we suffered while doing such penance. We first opened on a song entitled 'Cheerfulness' which is admirably illustrated by its opposite, for never was anything half so dull; see The Harmonicon 6 (1828), 273.

## Why 1829?

For obvious reasons, historians who choose to write year-studies draw towards what Lévi-Strauss called 'hot chronologies', or years of particular creative intensity.

Literary historians, for example, are attracted to concentrations of canonic texts informed by political, social and cultural turbulence. Chandler's discussion of England in 1819 in the year of the Peterloo massacre is a now classic case in point. Similar hot-spots cry out for treatment. Operatic history's 1835, for example, saw the premiere of Bellini's I Puritani and Halévy's La Juive at the Paris Opéra (only a year before Meyerbeer's Les Huguenots) and Donizetti's Lucia di Lammermoor at the San Carlo in Naples. German scholars call these 'threshold years'. Dahlhaus speaks of 1830 as an example, it having seen "'the demise of the age of art" proclaimed by Heine, the musical consequences of the deaths of Beethoven and Schubert, and the simultaneous and dramatic appearance of Chopin and Liszt, Berlioz, Meyerbeer, and Schumann and Mendelssohn.... However obscure this leaves the ultimate meaning of our concept of 'watershed year', that is, one with a striking density of events, we are nevertheless unable to dispel the impression that 1830 was a watershed year in the history of music'.<sup>16</sup>

As far as 1829 London's received history goes: this particular date and case, to continue the thermometric metaphor, registers the degree zero of musical activity. Even in light of its political, social or cultural goings-on, it is remembered (if at all) as a cool, slow-moving chronology. Excepting Mendelssohn's revision of the third movement of his Symphony in C minor for the Philharmonic Concert in May, musicology recalls little of significance (see Chapter One). Lost between the momentous events of 1819 and agitation surrounding the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, the city reached such a state of political inertia by 1828, that Wellington, then head of the Ministry, boasted: 'There is no party remaining.... I could almost count upon my fingers those who are hostile to the government'.<sup>17</sup> This political calm – but for prospect of civil war in Ireland, the issue of Catholic Emancipation, and the odd disturbance at the Foreign Office (the Greek, and Russian-Turkey questions) – continued (largely) through 1829. It was only in 1830 that things began to 'hot up'. That year of landmarks not only witnessed the July Revolution in France, but saw the

<sup>16</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Mary D. George, ed., *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*, 11 vols. (London, 1952), XI, xxi.

beginnings of the national, agricultural and industrial strife which would climax in the high-pressure 'Days of May' and the partial relief of 1832 Reform. As far as 1829 went, though, things kept dark and still: nothing much happened.

Turning to music: the silence of the capital of 'das Land ohne Musik' in early nineteenth-century history is conspicuous. This is particularly the case if you consider, pace Benjamin's famous description of Paris as the 'capital of the nineteenth century', that London was the most powerful, active and diverse imperial centre the world had ever seen – it stretched its rule over a quarter of the known globe. The reasons why 1829 London rests at the degree zero of musical activity, in fact, relates in part to an artistic denial of that position in the world – a deflection of imperial guilt onto its aspirant neighbour. More than this, though, downplaying London is tied up with the interdisciplinary envy musicology has always shown to literary studies. Too easily overawed by its big brother, music scholarship has only recently begun to wean itself away from dealing with history as a series of bound works or canonic publications. That London proved particularly ill-suited to the production of original scores, therefore, meant traditional history counted doubly against it. Adding to the lists of dated musical texts, however, musicologists now increasingly argue for the significance of a parallel series of musical performances. This development fuels their impression of history's rapid rate-of-change, and completely overturns their notion of the backwardness of musical London.

The effect of this anti-literary shift on our view is crucial to the discussion in two ways. The first has to do with the expansion of nineteenth-century nationalism and its lingering presence in modern scholarship. The proliferation of foreign music played by foreign musicians has led to a hugely prevalent and, so far as I am aware, unchallenged misconception: that because few of the early nineteenth-century musical rages were purely 'English' in the patriotic sense of the word, then nothing much can be said to have happened there. Hoping to fill a vacant gap, recent 'patriotic' musicology has entered a desperate search for something of value (that is, Beethovenian) in the scores of Crotch, Bishop, Cooke and Smart, when evidence shows that these figures were much better at assimilating, administering and performing music than composing it themselves. Why have your own culture when you can have the world's? Looked at in terms of a work-history, early nineteenth-century London seems bleak. But as a centre for the consumption and performance of music, the city was unrivalled. By gathering foreign musicians into its concert



halls, London drew together the latest practices from across the continent, and made them its own.<sup>18</sup> 1829 may have seen Mendelssohn's revival of Bach's St Matthew Passion in Berlin, the resumption of Habeneck's Beethoven concerts, Rossini's last opera Guillaume Tell, and Berlioz's first drafts of the Symphonie fantastique in Paris. But as a centre for performance, no cosmopolitan centre could match the English capital.

Apart from missing London's importance as a centre for performance, the bound models of literary history also overrate the significance of hot chronology where music is concerned. Because writing or reading generally occur in the private sphere, they require far less social cohesion, communal work and economic stability than the public arts of concert, opera or theatre. There is a sense here in which cool chronologies, while they may give up interest to more closeted representational forms, actually assist in the flowering of musical culture. Agitation in the public sphere, in fact, may undermine the very possibility of concert or operatic activity. Censorship, moreover, while hardly ever a factor in instrumental performance, is always a consideration in musical theatre – especially at times of political distress. The dependence of literary year-studies on 'hot chronology', therefore, does not apply to similarly-framed musical histories. My selection of 1829 as a unit for research bets on this assumption: hot chronologies do not necessarily produce 'hot' music.

### **Histrionicity: the melodramatisation of culture**

As cases and dates are piled up and historical states thrown into high relief, today's history takes on a fraught intensity. Memory no longer expresses itself eloquently in the sober progression of broadly-spun textual inscription – in the steady succession of words (logos) in a document. Instead, history signifies fact and case more contemporaneously in a thick, multi-layered, music-like or melodramatic mode (melos) – which might isolate, as in this thesis, a series of inter- or disconnected case studies. The heightened pitch and register of the new historical imagination acts itself into the past in the same way music acts itself into drama: by quickening pace, overlaying information, unbalancing sense, exaggerating situation. Concentrations of

<sup>18</sup> My argument here is similar to one made by critics in the 1820s. 'The English are a musical people', one noted, 'though their claim to this distinction rests more upon their taste in adapted and naturalising the music of other countries, than on the patronage and attention they bestow upon their own'; see The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review IV (1822), 137.

scale project historical memory towards the 'wreckage' (as Benjamin called it) of a superabundantly precise past. History might be orchestrated, in other words, as a bewildering succession of intensely felt year-studies, heightening both the general sense of music-like fullness on one hand and our specific sense of historical situatedness (presence) on the other.

This insaturation of the past by recent writers, as we have seen, raises the ghost of romantic historicism. To an uncanny degree, today's situation revisits the late 1820s – though in a far from identical form – where history-making at its most pressurised was literally set to music. The Enigma of History conjured up in Walter Scott's novel *Waverley* (1814) moved through the paintings of Hayden, the restored classic tragedies of Shakespeare and the revisionist melodramas of Pixérécourt, Fitzball and Milner in the 1820s, and emerged as the full phantasmagoria of grand opera in the early 1830s. Musical dramatisations of history raised the year-study to extreme temperatures: Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (1835), for example, targeted the St Bartholemew Day Massacre in 1572 Paris, while Deshayes turned Auber's intense vision of the 1647 Neapolitan uprisings (*La Muette de Portici*) into an even more inundated balletic version, *Masaniello* (1829). Throughout the 1820s, the melodramatic stage saw routine, though now less familiar, spectacularisations of historical dates. It was an age, in other words, when art and artists expressed their situatedness, not only in the confined terms of literature, painting or drama, but also in the more open language of music. A newly excessive sense of presence was acted into culture, not principally through word, rhetoric, image or gesture, but, most thoroughly, via overstatements in sound. Musical drenchings of events flooded history and every sphere of life. Increasingly, social 'reality' and personal subjectivity were intensely imagined, vividly defined, hotly partisan, melodramatic, hyperreal, and, above all, supremely modern. Culture was set to an orchestral accompaniment.

Why else would one talk of 'the musical life' of a particular state or nation? An innocent enough expression, perhaps, except if it implies that the task of historical description is to 'bring things to life'. The phrase suggests that an environment, an historical body, may be resurrected musically; hence the notion of the 'spirit of music', the idea that music has presence. To describe the 'musical life' of a site, in conventional prose, is no small thing: it means to perform what this subtitle calls a 'melodramatisation' of culture. Place and time expect to be raised from the dead, literally; the historian is licensed to revive history in all fullness of being.

But to breathe into existence is also to assume that, at the point of contact, one's object of study is strangely lifeless. The romantic scholar enters the field of history as though it were an exotic alter-world. His library is a labyrinth, threatening in its unfamiliarity, bewildering in complexity. If the archive is to be given a voice, to speak for itself, it should do so in all its strangeness. Perhaps this is why, in the way it attempts to defamiliarize, this thesis is not so much a history, as an ethnology of English listening (which is not to say that it seeks only to 'reverse the gaze', to make the British centre seem 'ethnic' or 'primitive'). Every act of what Benjamin called 'scavenging' – working with ephemera and fragments – disturbs the historian's once smooth connection with the past, as each case study insists on its peculiarity. Bit-histories must confront events that make no obvious contextual sense, for the simple reason that there is little else to fall back upon; there is less in the past that can be discarded. This is why history-making has become so richly fraught; why the past has become so frustrating, dense and alluring – 'a foreign country' as L. P. Hartley famously described it in 1953. To describe history in ethnographic terms is not to imply that the past has grown so 'out there' as to become irrelevant. Rather, it is to say that our sense of self is resituating itself. If the past has to do with us, which it surely does, then we are increasingly becoming foreigners – strangers to ourselves.

### **On what might have been**

This thesis has abandoned the need for a conclusion. There is no need to 'sum up on what exists' or pontificate over general principles of practice in 1829. There will be no 'at the end', general ontology of music, breakdown of 'what took place', or Absolute Theory of Everything. In the absence of a magnificent finale, it remains to specify where I am coming from – to identify 'what has been seen' in the archive, 'what has been interesting'. What has been the agenda?

In general, my selection of data implies an avoidance of the notion that music was 'the most Romantic of the arts' because it was 'not of this world' or in some way ineffable (a notion engineered by E.T.A. Hoffmann and the German Idealists). This work acts as a counterbalance to the prevalent view that 'Romantic Music' is supra-historical, super-expressive, metaphysical, endlessly infinite and 'always in the beyond'. Instead, I want to suggest that there was an explosion of interest in the materiality of music at this time: studies in the velocity of sound abound, music's visual aspect becomes interesting, its relation to the body is studied, the practice of



musical analysis gains currency, structural organicism starts to relate music to the natural world, manuscript studies proliferate, cognitive studies of music come into their own, printed scores are mass produced, and so on. Music, in the early nineteenth century, shifts to become more unworldly and more worldly; physical and metaphysical. The dialectic, in fact, defines the aesthetic.

I would like to take this further, but cannot. Since this is a partial history of music, much has been omitted. A chapter on studies and exercises for the pianoforte beckoned (involving discussions of tutors, hand positions, and keyboard pedagogy; Kalkbrenner, Clementi and Hummel to name a few published or composed studies in 1829). On 2 June 1829, another vignette tempted: Thomas Attwood directed a setting of Psalm 100 in St Paul's Cathedral. Attended by Mendelssohn, this occasion was remarkable for its assemblage of several thousand orphans, who sang from an immense scaffold erected beneath the building's dome. Another chapter might have looked at diplomacy and the international opera industry: the manager of the King's Theatre in 1829 was Jean François Laporte, who, on closer investigation, turned out to be a frontman for the first directeur-entrepreneur of the Théâtre Italien in Paris, Émile Laurent (the company in fact split itself between the two capitals in 1829). Equally interesting, in a continental sense, was Jean-François Sudre's remarkable Musical Language, a work published as a dictionary of melodies that more than a few people learnt to 'speak' (his system was put to military use in 1829). Still more vignettes evaded inclusion: Ferdinand Ries' The Colosseum, Rondo alla polacca for the Piano-forte, for example, might have provided support to my description of the extraordinary panorama in Regent's Park, which opened in 1829.

The following made it to final draft: a castrato analysed in terms of the emergence of the biological sciences; a danced Beethoven symphony discussed in terms of ballet and concert trends; a melodrama dealt with in view of imperialism; duet-singing studied with hints towards psychoanalysis; and the exchange of a musical annual looked at in view of the anthropology and philosophy of the gift. A 'fuller' picture of the year might have been constructed, but such a construction would only have achieved a false sense of 'knowing'. The scraps that remain, whatever their merit, are at least more redolently historical than the absolute fiction scholars have grown used to defending.





Plate 2. Cruchley's New Plan of London, Showing all the New and Intended Improvements to the Present Time (London, 1829), with selected sites of musical interest.

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Argyll Rooms and Regent's Harmonic Institution | 11. Regent's Park Colosseum                               | 21. Vincent Novello's residence  |
| 2. Hanover Square Concert Rooms                   | 12. Egyptian Hall   | 22. William Horsley, Organist of the Asylum and Belgrave Chapel        |
| 3. Royal Academy of Music                         | 13. Burford's Panorama                                    | 23. George Smart's residence   |
| 4. King's Theatre                                 | 14. Cocks & Co., Music Warehouse                          | 24. Felix Mendelssohn's rooms at Friedrich Heinke's, German ironmonger |
| 5. Theatre Royal, Drury Lane                      | 15. Erard Showrooms and Factory                           | 25. Ignaz Moscheles' residence   |
| 6. Theatre Royal, Covent Garden                   | 16. Clementi and Co., Music Warehouse                     | 26. Giovanni Battista Velluti's rooms in the Prince of Wales Hotel     |
| 7. Adelphi Theatre                                | 17. Chappell & Co.  | 27. Maria Malibran's temporary residence                               |
| 8. Olympic Theatre                                | 18. Mori & Lavenue, New Musical Subscription Library      | 28. Heinrich Heine's rooms   |
| 9. Surrey Theatre                                 | 19. Goulding & D'Almaine, Music Storehouse and Publishers |  |
| 10. Lyceum, English National Opera                | 20. Cramer & Beale, Music Warehouse                       |  |



## The Life of Babylon

The metropolis of this world, – the immeasurable Babel which lay outstretched with its thousand towers, and its hundred thousand sins, its fog and smoke, its treasures and misery, further than the eye could reach.

Prince Pückler-Muskau<sup>1</sup>

### Setting the scene

When Samuel Taylor Coleridge contemplated the Encyclopaedia Metropolitana, or Universal Dictionary of Knowledge (1817–45), his view was that the ‘methodological compendium’ should be organised not alphabetically (as had the London Encyclopaedia of 1829) but by theme: Pure Sciences, Applied Sciences and Fine Arts. His ‘poetic’ method related to one of the most ambitious and ill-advised publishing projects of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Coleridge’s argument was that only a fluid, topical scheme of organisation could effectively represent the full circle of human knowledge. All knowledge, he presumed, whilst it might be edited and made voluminous, could not be ordered according to the old orders of dissection and classification. The world was not that neat, hence his ‘trichotomous scheme’. Work on the project had to be distributed among many, every unit applied to the task. This was why the compendium bore the appellation ‘Metropolitana’: no individual could

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Ludwig Heinrich Pückler-Muskau, Tour in England, Ireland, and France, in the Years 1828 and 1829, 4 vols (London, 1832), III, 383. Comparisons with the ancient Assyrian capital were frequently made. In his memoirs, Edward Fitzball (of whom more later) wrote of the 1820s metropolis: ‘London is at length before us; London, mighty incomprehensible London, which rises out of its dim smoke, like a vast Babylon, under the potent incantation of some dark wizard’s wand’; see Edward Fitzball, Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author’s Life, 2 vols (London, 1859), I, 75.

<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, the project (funded by Gale and Fenner) was unworkable, and flopped gloriously. When the 59-volume hotchpotch eventually appeared under the editorship of a group of vicars in 1845, it had four parts: Pure Sciences, Mixed and Applied Sciences, History and Biography, and, as if to admit defeat, an alphabetical ‘Miscellaneous’ section. For the related 1829 compendium led by Coleridge’s one-time collaborator on the project, see Thomas Curtis, The London Encyclopædia, or Universal Dictionary of Science, Art, Literature, and practical Mechanics.... By the original Editor of the Encyclopaedia Metropolitana, 22 vols (London: T. Tegg, 1829).

achieve on the scale of the collective. The metropolis, after all, was the equivalent of the 'mind' of culture, the last word in human progress, the centre from which the totality of science, knowledge and understanding radiated.<sup>3</sup>

A transformation was under way in London. Since the turn of the nineteenth century, the metropolis had doubled in size, expanding from approximately 800,000 to nearly one and half million inhabitants in less than thirty years.<sup>4</sup> No longer a corporation – an encyclopaedia – of parts, the city was turning into one giant, thrashing organism – a nitrogen-breathing Leviathan. In 1828, Heinrich Heine wrote of London: 'I have seen the greatest wonder which the world can show to the astonished spirit; I have seen it, and am still astonished'.<sup>5</sup> The capital took on the appalling majesty of Babylon, as seen in the famous 1828 mezzotints of John Martin, and the writings of Hawthorn (*A Visit to Babylon*, 1829) or Mudie (*A Second Judgement of Babylon the Great*, 1829).<sup>6</sup> But with this difference: it was as though the myriad of languages and tongues had disappeared, and all had combined to speak a single, incomprehensible preter-language. The urban sprawl, commentators observed, was beginning to behave like a 'live' singularity, a vast semi-conscious being.

Westminster, the City of London, Marylebone, the Boroughs: all parts integrated into the whole, the specific become general, every class of person now understood in terms of networks of social, economic and political dependence. A great centrifugal revolution took place, as the urban mass – a culture of production and consumption – circulated in a universe of capital exchange. New laws on property, ownership and bartering rights tied the populace to organised labour and the formal economy: the Game Laws, Poor Laws, anti-Luddite legislation and so on. The first city censuses were conducted (in 1801, 1811 and 1821). Political economy became the urgent intellectual science: every parish studied, social life quantified; trends monitored, management techniques drawn up, some behaviours encouraged,

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<sup>3</sup> See Alice D. Snyder, ed., *S.T. Coleridge's Treatise on Method as Published in The Encyclopaedia Metropolitana* (London, 1934) and *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana; or Universal Dictionary of Knowledge*, ed. E. Smedley, 26 vols (London, 1829–45).

<sup>4</sup> The census of 1801 registered a population of 864,845; by 1821 there were 1,225,965; see Dana Arnold, *Re-presenting the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience, and Social Life in London, 1800–1840* (Aldershot, 2000), 66.

<sup>5</sup> Heinrich Heine, 'Pictures of Travel', *The Works of Heinrich Heine*, trans. Charles Godfrey Leland, 12 vols (London, 1891), 344.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert Mudie, *A Second Judgement of Babylon the Great; or, More Men and Things in the British Capital* (London, 1829) and Henry Hawthorn, *A Visit to Babylon with Observations Moral and Political* (London, 1829).

others not; vast economic forecasts made. On 19 June 1829 policing was finally brought under the control of the first central authority in Greater London: the Metropolitan London Police Force. The Home Secretary collected the myriad vestries, localities, constabularies, Night Watches, Thief-Takers and Bow Street Runners into one body; many saw Robert Peel's new 'Bobbies' in terms of a gens d'armes, 'corps of spies', or what Tory radical William Cobbett called the 'establishment à la Bourbon'.<sup>7</sup> For the first time, law and order was maintained centrally; strategy shifted from crime detection to prevention, deterrence and visible policing. Surveillance and control, managed from a germinal cell, an operations hub, ordered social conduct. A modern Orwellian world – Foucault would have called this une régime panoptique – was instituted; people began to behave as though they were being watched. A powerful enmeshing was in process, as the metropolis pursued its own becoming.

Was this not why John Nash cut arteries through the city centre? So that the urban mass could better feel the life coursing through it? Was not 'naturalisation' – to manage the western spread of the city by redesigning Hyde Park, St James Park and Green Park – at the heart of the chief architect's plans for the capital? Between 1812 and 1830 a grand scheme of 'Metropolitan Improvements' was carried out by the Office of Woods and Works, an agency of the Crown answerable to parliament with Nash at its head. The brief was nothing less than to represent the city's proper or organic position as World Capital and Imperial Metropolis. Around 1829, when the scheme was running out of support, such observers as James Elmes were hailing George IV for overseeing 'the Augustan Age of England', his capital being 'the Rome of modern history'. Elmes marvelled at how labyrinthine squalor had metamorphosed into 'picturesque and splendid' environs, 'Mary-le-bone Park' (now Hyde Park) abandoning its cowsheds to become 'a rural city of almost eastern magnificence'.<sup>8</sup> Nash's most commented-upon achievement was the conversion of New Street into modern Regent Street: the thoroughfare was widened, national and

<sup>7</sup> See reports on the police, for example, in *The Atlas* (1829), 611b. For Cobbett on the 'police state', see Mary D. George, ed., *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in The British Museum*, 11 vols (London, 1952), X, xxv. The minor theatres brought out a host of melodramas attacking the new power, two examples being J. B. Buckstone's *Vidocq, the French Police Spy* (Coburg, July 1829) and Douglas Jerrold's copy *Vidocq! The French Police Spy* (Surrey, July 1829), the playbill of which promised to guide the spectator through 'remote recesses of Society, those dark, mysterious and sometimes appalling transactions'; see Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge, 2000), 159–60.

<sup>8</sup> See James Elmes, *Metropolitan Improvements; or London in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1830), 1–7.

royal landmarks built to mark its path; arcades were erected, arching like repeating mollusc shells down to Charing Cross. These moving wrought-iron forms – arcades, as Benjamin has shown, were quintessentially of the nineteenth century<sup>9</sup> – ushered traffic along a south axis from the recently drained Regent's Park, the lungs of the city, to Waterloo Place (1816) at the banks of the Thames. Together with the strengthening of an east-west passage skirting the capital's northern edge (now Marylebone, Euston and Pentonville Roads), Nash's renovations set up flows and nerve centres. Redevelopment at The Mall and Piccadilly, for example, took on fresh emphasis under his scheme; Trafalgar Square began to be laid out in 1829. On the periphery to the north-west, the ionic columns of the Hyde Park Screen arose to form an impressive gateway to the imperial capital; a point of entry from whence to enjoy the metropolitan experience; travel books began their narratives here. Far from denaturing the city, mechanisation gave the environment an organic plasticity. The metropolis – though its buildings plundered the aesthetic grammar of antiquity – proved to be more natural than Nature herself.

Government committees on memorials and monuments were set up to establish sites of public interest, places of leisure and repositories of learning and knowledge: Robert Smirke's British Museum (1823), General Post Office (1824–9) and King's College (1829), John Nash's Royal Academy (1826), Sir John Soane's Royal Entrance to the House of Lords (1822–7), William Wilkins' University College (1826). Zones of commercial and business activity began to separate from places of pastoral repose – landscaped areas for parks, fountains, amusement and flânerie: Charles Barry's Athenaeum (1829) in the style of an Italian Renaissance palazzo, Decimus Burton's London Zoo (1828) or Thomas Hornor's Colosseum (1829). Bridges crept over the Thames – in 1829 the City was completing John Rennie's enlargement of London Bridge, whilst the first suspension bridge in the capital, the Hammersmith, opened for traffic in 1827.<sup>10</sup> For the first time, tunnels burrowed beneath London's once formidable waterway – a subterranean root system sustaining the surface. The

<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

<sup>10</sup> In the 1960s, this bridge, which replaced the old London Bridge to the south, was transported, stone by stone, to Lake Havasu, Arizona.

first subaqueous Thames Tunnel, engineered by Marc Brunel, connected Wapping to Rotherhithe in 1825.<sup>11</sup>

It was not enough that the metropolis should have external form – a skin, mechanical parts, limbs. A subconscious must be active beneath the surface too, a labyrinthine world of underground passages, sewers, rats and disease. At night, the city breathed gas, as if it were dreaming – the authorities commissioned the Gas-Light and Coke Company to illuminate the city as early as 1812. In this long-term project the corporation was directed to make focal points of Westminster Bridge and the southern end of Regent Street around the Italian opera house. 'The King's Theatre becomes the centre from which light is projected, and around which all the *stellae minores* move', observed the Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review in 1822. 'Hence the conduct of this grand emporium from which the supply of music and its examples are set forth becomes much more important'.<sup>12</sup> The cultivation of this entertainment hub in the West End, centred around the Italian Opera, gave light to the urban imagination. How else was the city's creative side, its desires and intuitions, to be provided for? Inside the theatres, gas-light made for an ambience both alluring and dangerous. On 20 November 1828, two workers died when the oil-gas apparatus they were cleaning in the cellars of Covent Garden Theatre exploded. For moralists, this was an act of God, a warning against the depravity of the West End.<sup>13</sup>

The zones of wakefulness and dreaming, public and private, official and domestic, work and leisure, exterior and interior, urban and rural, science and culture became separated at this time, but only in so far as they retained their attraction for each other. They became the day and night of urban living, Nash's improvements weaving a double-sidedness into the fabric of everyday life: bridges and tunnels, offices and parks, markets and theatres, pavements and arcades, exteriors and interiors, a conscious-subconscious flow to everyday existence. Such playgrounds as the open counters of the 'vanity-fair' or bazaar came into their own

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<sup>11</sup> The tunnel is now used by London Underground's East London Line to pass under the Thames. Built by the French father-son team of Marc and Isambard, the 1,300 foot-pedestrian walkway flooded disastrously in 1827, was drained, and then flooded again on 12 January 1828. It was abandoned for seven years.

<sup>12</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review IV (1822), 241. Another observer wrote that 'it is the very paradise of the imagination; the fancy roves in a delicious wilderness of charms, and ravishment on each side captivates the senses'; see The London Magazine I (January 1820), 91.

<sup>13</sup> Performances were not resumed until 3 December 1828; see Henry Saxe Wyndham, The Annals of Covent Garden Theatre from 1732 to 1897, 2 vols (London, 1906), II, 54.



in the 1820s: the Soho Bazaar (the first of this type was built on the north-west corner of Soho Square by John Trotter in 1816); the Opera Colonnade (the arcade at the King's Theatre for hairdressing, opera glasses, libretti, great coats, bonnets, gambling); the nearby 'horse-bazaar' on St Martin's Lane (for transport); the Royal Bazaar on 73 Oxford Street (for silverware, cut-glass, millinery, lace, gloves, hosiery, jewellery, sheet music, artificial flowers, children's books).<sup>14</sup> The phantasmic universe of commodity consumption balanced against the rival world of capital production. To entertain the madness of one's private world, one had to spend hours in the drudging 'reality' of work. But this day-to-day systemisation of life was never dulling; the urban-rural energy of the metropolis depended upon it. The banal, by its very tediousness, stirred up the city's sense of majesty and mysticism. Ritual – together with a certain piety and single-mindedness – was fundamental to the liturgy of everyday life.

As with any organic object, the urban landscape had to move and grow. On 4 July 1829, the first public omnibus began its route from Paddington to Bank via Regent's Park and Angel. Operated by George Shillibeer and carrying 22 passengers, this first journey offered competition to the Hackney Carriages of central London. Robert Louis Stephenson's famous success with 'The Rocket' near Liverpool in October 1829 mooted the notion of rail passenger travel and smoothed the way for George Walker's proposals for the London-Greenwich line in 1832. 'Progress' became the watchword of Science and the Arts. The city no longer had an empty, timeless conception of its past. Its history had been 'naturalised'. Dreadful and indiscriminate, the metropolis now moved with the energy of a primitive force, evolving according to its own patterns and trajectories. Time no longer pointed to a static present; instead it hurried on, both towards the past and future. This was why market analysts and social commentators imagined prospects at once Arcadian and apocalyptic: there were grounds for hope, but they were counterbalanced by premonitions of regression, and visions of Biblical Assyria.

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<sup>14</sup> The Royal Bazaar, British Diorama and Exhibition of Works of Art or the so-called 'White Lion Yard' opened in the spring of 1828. It was the speculation of the silversmith, Thames Hamlet, and modelled on the Soho Square original. For more on London's 'horse bazaar', see the letter of 7 October 1826 in Pückler-Muskau, *Tour in England, Ireland*, III, 51: 'hundreds of carriages and harnesses of every kind, new and old (the latter made to look like new) are exposed to sale, at all prices, in a very long gallery. In other rooms porcelain wares, articles of dress, glass mirrors, 'quincaillerie', toys.... At length you reach a coffee room in the centre of the establishment'.



More than ever, strangers pushed past each other on the street. The recent libertarian trend in politics and overseas conquests meant that there was increasing inter-racial, inter-class and inter-gender mixing in London: paupers, neo-puritans, aristocrats, orphans, Catholics (in April 1829, the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed through Parliament), radicals, anti-monarchists, military men, Jews, Blacks, Chinese, Indians, Poles, Frenchmen and Italians, flashes, fops, dandies, fancies and Corinthians: all children of urban anonymity.

### The city in C minor

In April 1829, having recently arrived in London, the nineteen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn wrote home:

It is awful! It is mad! I am quite giddy and confused. London is the grandest and most complicated monster on the face of the earth.... How can I compress into one letter what I have experienced in the last three days!... Things toss and whirl about me as if I were in a vortex, and am whirled along with them.... Could you but once ... walk down Regent Street and see the wide bright street with its arcades (alas! It is enveloped in thick fog today!), and the shops with the letters as big as men, and the stage-coaches piled up with people, and a row of vehicles outrun by the foot-passengers because in one place the smart carriages have stopped the way! Here a horse prances to a house where the rider has friends. There you see men used as ambulating advertisement-boards on which the most graceful achievements of accomplished cats are promised. Then there are beggars, negroes, and those fat John Bulls with their slender, beautiful two daughters hanging on their arms.<sup>15</sup>

Less than a month later, Mendelssohn penned another letter, this time to his eldest sister, Fanny. He again described a walk he had taken down Regent Street: in search of air while about two hundred auditors, mostly women, sat in on a rehearsal of Mozart's Symphony in E flat (K543).<sup>16</sup> The auditeures occupied a large concert room on the top floor of a building at the Regent Street end of Argyll Place. The new Argyll Rooms, as the venue was called, was used by the orchestra of the Philharmonic Society both for performance and rehearsal.<sup>17</sup> It had been erected to

<sup>15</sup> The 25 April 1829 letter was addressed to his father and sister, Rebecka; see G. Seldon-Goth, ed., Felix Mendelssohn: Letters (London, 1946), 43–4.

<sup>16</sup> This letter described the events of 24 May and was dated two days later; it is reproduced in Myles Birket Foster, History of the Philharmonic Society of London: 1813–1912 (London, 1912), 92.

<sup>17</sup> The extent to which Mendelssohn struggled to convince the directors of the Philharmonic Society that he was a worthwhile musician has recently been revealed in letters suppressed in the secondary literature. Administrative bungling, indolence and open lies characterised the Society's dealings with

substitute for its predecessor, which, standing where Oxford Circus Underground Station stands today, had to be demolished to make way for Nash's improvements. Returning to the concert room, Mendelssohn found himself directing the first and last rehearsal of his 'Sinfonia No. 13', now known as the Symphony no. 1 in C minor. The public premiere would take place the following day, in a far less domestic, womanly environment. Again a double-sidedness occurs – the audience for this debut would be mostly male.<sup>18</sup>

Context exercised a considerable influence on the young composer. (We know, for example, that he contemplated the end of the finale of his Reformation Symphony five hundred feet underground, in a lead mine in Wales.)<sup>19</sup> With Regent Street in view, he now preferred an altered version of the C minor symphony he had composed in March 1824. Instead of the original third movement, a standard minuet and trio, Mendelssohn introduced an orchestrated version of the scherzo from his Octet (op. 20).<sup>20</sup> Why he did so is not clear, although it may well have been to do with the 'most complicated monster' on the concert room doorstep – 'the whirling vortex' of the city. In the event, his new environment seemed far more amenable to the taut structure of the scherzo than to the stately design of the original.

Mendelssohn called the minuet and trio marked 'Allegro molto' a 'pleonasm'. It featured no less than five internal repeats, large sections of homophonic writing and a straight-laced da capo. In a letter written five days after the rehearsal, Mendelssohn confessed that he thought the minuet lacked economy; he wrote that it

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him. The illustrious Sir George Smart, Mendelssohn later found, had repeatedly informed other members how 'I actually only made music for fun, and how it was not necessary for me [to perform] and how I was there as a gentleman, and in no way situated as a professor'; see Jourdan, 'Mendelssohn in England', 93–4.

<sup>18</sup> A male-female double-sidedness seemed to be a feature of Mendelssohn's concerts at this time. A little-known fact concerning his famous Bach revivals of 11 March and 21 March 1829 in Berlin (the St Matthew Passion performances) was that proceeds went towards founding a sewing school for girl paupers; see Eduard Devrient, My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and His Letters to Me, trans. Natalia MacFarren (London, 1869), 63.

<sup>19</sup> This occurred in July 1829; see R. Larry Todd, Mendelssohn: A Life in Music (Oxford, 2003), 217.

<sup>20</sup> The Octet's development section originally consisted of three parts, delineated clearly by texture: a tremolo-pizzicato design, a section of scattered polyphony, and finally an episode featuring a rising chromatic harmonic progression over solo violin figuration. When Mendelssohn orchestrated the scherzo for London, the music remained essentially the same, except that the second and third parts of the development were recomposed so that the recapitulation and tonic return were better prepared. From an analytical point of view, the new version has seemed less interesting. The original had gently obfuscated the restatement of the theme by returning to the subject with a cadential 6/4 underlay. The two versions may be usefully compared: Felix Mendelssohn, 'Octett, op. 20', in Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy's Werke, ed. Julius Rietz, 19 vols (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1874–80), V, and Felix Mendelssohn, Scherzo in G Minor Scored for Use with Symphony No. 1 (London, 1911).

'seemed boring'.<sup>21</sup> So when he presented his substitution to the Philharmonic Society on his return from Regent Street, a range of instruments – wind, brass and percussion – had joined the instruments of the Octet. The Athenaeum singled out the result for praise, adding its customary anti-Beethoven gibe for good measure.<sup>22</sup> The review, interestingly, suggests that Mendelssohn paired down the Philharmonic's string section for the movement, the music whirling away from the rest of the symphony.

An unusually delicious, playful and original scherzo in C minor [sic] (apparently written for the occasion) gave delight to every auditor, and was unanimously encored. It was performed by only a limited number of violins, tenors, and basses, but obligato for them and all the wind instruments.... The whole composition was sensible, clear, striking, and yet original.... Mendelssohn's composition exhibited great originality, without that incoherent eccentricity which Beethoven unfortunately has recourse to.<sup>23</sup>

Richard Bacon in the Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review echoed these sentiments: 'the scherzo is admitted by the best judges to be pre-eminent to a degree that perhaps has never been equalled, certainly never exceeded'. He could not leave it there: 'The originality of conception which is displayed in the novel effects, not less than in the diversity of the means, declare the composer's genius and resources'.<sup>24</sup> Edward Taylor of the Spectator, meanwhile, betrayed a splendid but enlightening ignorance: 'the minuets have more decided originality in their contrivance than any other part of the sinfonia'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For Mendelssohn's less than favourable opinion of the minuet and trio, with details of the letter of 29 May; see Eric Werner, *Mendelssohn: A New Image of the Composer and his Age*, trans. Dika Newlin (New York, 1963), 148; see also Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, *Symphony No. 1, C minor, op. 11*, ed. Max Alberti (London, 1964), 88–107.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine Wade, Robert Bell and Neville Butler Challoner were associated with the Athenaeum at this time; see Leanne Langley, 'The English Musical Journal', Ph.D. diss. (N. Carolina, 1983), 540.

<sup>23</sup> The Athenaeum 85 (10 June 1829), 364. I look forward to hearing the effect of this reduction in a modern setting.

<sup>24</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 10 (1828–30), 298.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor felt that, as a whole, the symphony was 'a work of a very high order ... formed upon the model of Haydn'. Taking up a common preoccupation in London newspaper circles, he then moved to underline the world-class credentials of the Philharmonic Society Orchestra: 'I had some conversation with Mr Mendelssohn after the rehearsal ... [and] he transferred much of the praise which we, most honestly, gave him, to the band'; see The Spectator 48 (30 May 1829), 346. Berlioz also heard the work, but two years later, in a 'deranged' version, reworked by Mendelssohn, for violin, double bass and piano duet. Whilst he accused Mendelssohn of being a 'note-weaver' in the 'detestable' fugal finale, he remembered the scherzo being 'fresh and pungent'; see his letter to Ferdinand Hiller of 1 January 1832 in Hector Berlioz, *Correspondance générale*, ed. Pierre Citron, 8 vols (Paris, 1972), I, 517.

If the scherzo was not enough, Mendelssohn caused a minor riot on rehearsal-day by producing what he later described as a 'white stick, which [he] had made on purpose (the maker took [him] for an alderman and would insist on decorating it with a crown)'.<sup>26</sup> With this, the composer conducted the band. Nettel has pointed out that this somewhat indelicate 'stick' (early batons could be cumbersome by modern standards), since it had a crown, was probably the staff of a Sheriff's Officer! It is extraordinary that Mendelssohn, in the year of the city's Metropolitan Police Force, should be induced to centralise orchestral authority with such an imposing implement. Before 1829, the sight of the conductor's truncheon was unfamiliar; the orchestra was still organised along the lines of a dialogue amongst players – instrumental 'subjects' would engage in exchange, conversation and, at times of agreement, co-operation. In Mendelssohn's hands, however, at least for rehearsal, symphonic discourse changed: the orchestra was reconceived as a single unit: as a living, breathing, centrally regulated organism.<sup>27</sup>

Wagner's chilling words of the later century come to mind:

This new style of [Jewish] Conductor forthwith planted himself atop of the musical confraternity, somewhat as the Banker on top of our world of work. For this he had to bring something ready in his pocket, something the step-by-step musician did not own, or found most hard to come by, and seldom in sufficiency: as the banker has Capital, this gentleman brought his Polish (*Gebildetheit*).<sup>28</sup>

For Wagner, had he known about it, 23 May 1829 would have been the original Jewish-commercial triumph, not merely related to Peel's new system of city policing. All the trappings were there: organised capital, gleaming surfaces and what he used to call 'pseudo-culture'. But, (fortunately for Wagnerites) this Mendelssohnian set-up did not last: the following day, Taylor reported that the young Berliner passed by the

<sup>26</sup> Reginald Nettel, *The Orchestra in England: A Social History* (London, 1946), 120.

<sup>27</sup> Conductors seemed to be aware that their batons imbued the now organic whole with an almost magical 'spirit'; they became fetish objects. Berlioz exchanged 'musical sceptres' with Mendelssohn around 1843, and remembered sending his with a typically bizarre letter entitled 'To Chief Mendelssohn!'. 'Great Chief!', he wrote: 'We are pledged to exchange tomahawks. Here is mine. It is rough-hewn. Yours too plain. Only squaws and palefaces love ornate weapons. Be my brother; and when the Great Spirit sends us to hunt in the land of souls, may our warriors hang our tomahawks side by side at the door of the council chamber'; see David Cairns, ed., *The Memoirs of Berlioz* (London, 1970), 359.

<sup>28</sup> Roger Nichols, ed., *Mendelssohn Remembered* (London, 1997), 216. I should point out, that after Bourdieu, the notion of 'cultural capital' could be routinely applied à la Wagner. But Wagner's lie was not that he misjudged Mendelssohn's imbrication in culture; rather, it was that he claimed his own music was somehow culture-free, that it had been purified of its ties with capital.

podium and 'took his stand at the pianoforte'.<sup>29</sup> The composer himself reported that the orchestral leader, François Cramer, led him to the keyboard 'like an old lady' amidst much bowing, applause and shaking of hands.

Nevertheless, the message of the scherzo remained. The movement had an unconventional surface, composed in duple rather than triple time. This was one of the first times an audience heard what we now know as a Mendelssohnian speciality: the capriccio-pianissimo texture familiar from *Ein Sommernachtstraum* (op. 21) or the middle section of the canzonetta from the E-flat String Quartet (op. 12), finished in London in September 1829. According to Fanny Mendelssohn, this particular 'Sempre pianissimo e leggiero' was inspired by a literary source:

Wolkenzug und Nebelflor  
Erhellen sich von oben.  
Luft im Laub und Wind im Rohr  
Und alles ist zerstoßen

[Cloudy drift and vapour's edge  
Are lighted from above  
Gusts in the leaves and winds in the reeds,  
And all is blown away.]<sup>30</sup>

These verses were from the first part of Goethe's *Faust*, ending the intermezzo, 'Walpurgis Night's Dream'. In the tragedy, they are spoken 'pianissimo' by the character 'Orchestra'. For Fanny this text was an origin, a Genesis. Elsewhere, she wrote that her brother 'confided his intentions to no one but me. The entire piece will be played staccato and pianissimo; the shivering tremolandos, the light flashes of rebounding trills – everything is new and strange, and yet so pleasing and agreeable, one feels so close to the world of spirits, so lightly borne into the breeze.... At the end the first violin flits off as light as a feather, and all is blown away'.<sup>31</sup> These lyrical visions of passing, these poetic scenes, these organic tones of ethereality and movement, suited the natural energy of the metropolis, its *Reizflut*, the mobile gaze of the flâneur and the rush of its people.

<sup>29</sup> *The Spectator* 48 (30 May 1829), 346. For more on the rehearsal and performance, see *The Harmonicon* 7 (1829), 141 and 173–4.

<sup>30</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy*, ed. Cyrus Hamlin, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd edn., trans. Walter Arndt (New York and London, 2001), 125. This translation is conjoined with another less impenetrable one found in Heinrich Eduard Jacob, *Felix Mendelssohn and His Times* (London, 1959), 58.

<sup>31</sup> I have borrowed most of this translation from Françoise Tillard, *Fanny Mendelssohn*, trans. Camille Naish (Portland, 1992), 127.





Plate 3. The first leaf of Mendelssohn's scherzo inserted as f. 38 into the autograph score of the First Symphony in C minor; The British Library, Royal Philharmonic Society, MS 109.

Without wishing to labour the point – to juxtapose a piece of music with a city! – a short analysis may be useful: but only in the sense that in the hands of such figures as Heinrich Birnbach in Germany, Antoine Reicha in France or Edward Holmes in England such prose descriptions of music (we might call them literary ekphrasis, realisations or re-performances) were becoming significant in the late 1820s.<sup>32</sup> We deal here with shifts not only in ways of thinking about organisation and structure; we are also confronted with changes in ways of perceiving, seeing and hearing – structural transformations that run deep in 1829 culture. Simply put, the shift from minuet to scherzo involved a turn from the static tabulation of form to its dynamic narration (which is why literary inspirations were so integral to the structure of that modern instrumental abstraction – The Music Itself).

What music acquires, in Mendelssohn's hands, is not so much a dynamism as an anthropology: a sense not only of sound taking on a body (hence its 'organicism'), but of it possessing 'spirit', a metaphysics of presence. By abandoning the minuet, the composer exchanged a form geared towards contrast, accretion, surface, return, repetition and balance, with a 'work-orientated' structure: a structure embroiled in becoming, depth, unfolding, generation, unity and transformation. Mendelssohn's scherzo was in what might be called a continuous sonata form. The first 'subject', marked pianissimo, was not so much a theme as an Eigentümlichkeit, a generating principle. All its components – the interval of the fourth (d''-g''), the lower neighbour-note (g''-f#''-g'' trill), the rising third (g''-b flat'') – were Bildungstriebes or cell motifs. Essentially characterless or non-thematic, these were nano-engines for the generation of the whole. A brief translation – a textual narrative in the manner of a late 1820s critic – should make the point.<sup>33</sup>

The opening phrase – already an airy, ill-defined thing – lasts eight bars. In bar 3, the first violin stutters out of its fourth-and-mordent pattern via a g''-b flat'' pivot and spins into semiquavers. This induces the violas – who along with the second violins have been playing third figurations – to split momentarily in two and follow. A counterstatement ensues in bar 9 with added woodwind, although the reappearance of the g''-(a'')-b flat'' pivot – now filled in – propels the phrase onto the

<sup>32</sup> I am thinking of the second edition of Reicha's *Traité de haute composition* (1826) or Heinrich's Birnbach's 'Über die verschiedenen Formen grösserer Instrumentalstücke', which appeared in the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* of 1827–8.

<sup>33</sup> For a more thorough (though perhaps less historically aware) analysis of the Octet, see Gregory John Vitercik, 'Mendelssohn the Progressive', *The Journal of Musicological Research* 8/3–4 (1989), 333–74.





sub-median. (In the Octet, this pivot was less prominent, since it anticipated the change of harmony by appearing half a beat earlier.) These filled-in thirds then litter a short bridge passage, supplying momentum to a section that prepares harmonically for the second subject. When the secondary key makes its appearance, it establishes not the dominant, but the relative major: so far, so conventional. At this point – the second theme – the original g<sup>♯</sup>–b flat<sup>♯</sup> kernel – comes into its own as ascending thirds are strung together between expanded trill leaps. In other words, the first subject, if we are to call it that, spawns the second. The skipping phrase that is generated pivots, in an equivalent way to the original theme, on the interval of a fourth (A–D). The note D being held over, the music suddenly slips, in the middle of the phrase, into the strangely remote-sounding key of the dominant. Sustained woodwind and lower strings extend the harmonic suspense whilst the flute and first violin make a ghostly echo of the first theme. By slight of hand, a hasty circle of fifths ushers away this intrusion and introduces the second theme's counterstatement as before. But this time, the A–D pivot is performed again, and the cello's fourths are insistent, as are the viola's repeating lower mordents. By the time the second subject peters out in bar 54, the interpolation has established the dominant – D major. This firmly articulated key, which has never been properly prepared, then overtakes the tail-end of the exposition, forming a giant upbeat to the return of the tonic and the repeat.

The exposition thus falls into three tonal areas: G minor, B flat major, D major. This is the geography of a traditional 'three-key' exposition, but with an important twist. The music has been weighted so that unprepared dominant material functions preparatorily, whilst secondary relative major content emerges fluidly from primary building blocks. From the point of view of the past, this arrangement is lopsided, since tonal polarisation or the sense of contrast between dual themes is skewed – true *concertante* principles absent. The strongest tonal opposition occurs not between rival subjects but between theme and after-thought, principal and transitionary material. We are witness here less to a dual interaction than a polished, highly sophisticated, linear and roving form – journeying in the mould of the archetypal 1830s quester. Instead of a pair of subjects in conversation, we are confronted with a myriad of thematic fragments: as if a silent presence is operative behind the musical surface. There is a sense of a mute agency plotting and scheming beneath events. Mendelssohn's preference for the scherzo, in other words, involved a

shift away from flat, geometric surfaces, towards a structure that is 'spirited', organic and coming-to-be. The human – the 'subjective' – is not located within the music itself. Rather, Mendelssohn locates agency outside the sonorous idea: the music unfolds as if it were being narrated. The scherzo has 'presence' – an identity – because Nature is apparently at work; hence the importance of Goethe's 'all is blown away'. The subject exists – shall I put this in Lacanian terms? – but only under erasure.

So we can picture the scene: at the centre of Nash's plans for London, on Regent Street, Mendelssohn conducts, but only for rehearsal. If he places his body amidst such music it is not to participate in it as a performer; rather his role is to narrate, to administer it. Whereas in rehearsal the instrumentalists had spread themselves out panoramically before this foreigner in the metropolis, they now only imagine his (regulating, all-seeing) presence. For the audience, events appear uncontrolled, or controlled surreptitiously. Everything is, as Fanny Mendelssohn put it, 'strange and new'. This is the symphonic ideal: the orchestra, the environment, the city, Babylon stirs into existence, as if magically. Music sets the scene.

## Ve(l)luti in speculum: the twilight of the castrato

### 'Beneath my window'

On the night of 15 May 1829 Felix Mendelssohn dreamt about Giovanni Battista Velluti, the last great operatic castrato. The singer's voice had been in his head since that afternoon, when they crossed paths at a concert at the Argyll Rooms on Regent Street in London. There, he heard the 'poor wretched creature', as he called him, sing an aria by Bonfichi and a duet with Henriette Sontag, Mayr's 'Deh! Per pietà' from *Ginevra di Scozia*. The singing of the 'confounded' Italian, 'so excited my loathing', Mendelssohn remembered, 'that it pursued me into my dreams that night'.<sup>1</sup> Three days later the composer was at his desk in 103 Great Portland Street writing to a friend. Outside on the road, he again spied the castrato going about his chores. 'Velluti', he wrote as the singer walked by, 'is just passing beneath my window'. It was a simple enough observation to make, but it seemed to comment on the cultural position of this singing species, on the voice that would not go away.<sup>2</sup>

This was the fate of the castrato around 1829: he haunted European culture, lurking just below what we might call its 'window'. In writings of the time, the male soprano begins to be depicted as ghoulish or nightmarish, as though inhabiting a dream. When the critic for the *New Monthly Magazine* heard Velluti's London debut and his first words 'Popoli dell'Egitto' in 1825, he wrote that they 'came upon the ear

<sup>1</sup> The *Times* of the following day lauded Velluti's 'powerful expression and elegance of ornament' in his aria, and hailed Sontag for 'that peculiar style of expression which the Germans denominate "soul-singing", and of which some critics have erroneously supposed her incapable'; see *The Times* 13,916 (16 May 1829), 5b. Less than two weeks later, on 30 May, Mendelssohn again fell into a dream. The last official performance of this Argyll Room concert series featured both him and the castrato. Arriving early on Regent Street to try out Weber's *Concert-Stück* (op. 79) on a 'strange, new Clementi grand-piano', Mendelssohn – according to his own report – fell 'unawares into strange fantasies, and dwelt on them until people began to come and remind me that I ought to have been studying'; see Jourdan, 'Mendelssohn in England', 100.

<sup>2</sup> For the letter of 18 May 1829, see Eduard Devrient, *My Recollections of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and his Letters to Me*, trans. Natalia MacFarren (London, 1869), 76 and Jourdan, 'Mendelssohn in England', 91.

like the spectral moan of an unearthly being'.<sup>3</sup> It was of little consolation that Meyerbeer had composed the part of Armando in *Il crociato in Egitto* for and in collaboration with Velluti. The chimera was still uncomfortably at home in the culture of the late 1820s and early 30s; his voice and figure had a subliminal quality, as if on the knife-edge between past and present.

As if to record the castrato's *sui generis* gender, Balzac constructed the hallucinatory world of *Sarrasine* (1830) around the spectre of his presence. The novella was probably written with Velluti in mind, the singer having visited Paris in 1825 on his way to London. 'I was deep in one of those daydreams', the now famous story opens, 'which overtake even the shallowest of men'. By way of explaining the strange wealth of the De Lancy family and the 'fragile machine' who lives in their midst, Balzac's narrator tells the tale of a castrato and a young sculptor named Sarrasine. Whilst in Rome, the Frenchman falls madly in love with the singer, believing him a woman. Sarrasine's error is revealed to him too late; only after he has desired too much. The story ends when Cardinal Cicognara, the castrato's patron, has the dangerously unstable sculptor murdered in order to protect his prize singer. As events unfold, it becomes clear that the source of the De Lancy's wealth is the shadowy half-man who now lives in their mansion. The 'real' backdrop for this story of extravagance, deception and death – told in terms of reminiscence and metaphor – rests on his unsettling provision.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 15/56 (1 August 1825), 344. The use of this entrance aria is interesting. For Meyerbeer's third version of *Il crociato*, given at the Teatro Grande in Trieste in Autumn 1824, the role of Armando was not taken by Velluti. Rather it fell to mezzo Carolina Bassi. In this production, overseen by Meyerbeer, Armando was downplayed. The magnificent entry of the ships into Damietta in the eighth scene did not introduce Felicia (as in the original Venetian production). Nor did it introduce Armando (as in the second Florentine version). Rather, it gave prominence to Adriano, the Grand Master of the Knights of Rhodes (tenor Nicola Tacchinardi) and his entrance aria 'Popoli dell'Egitto'. For the later London production, probably on Meyerbeer's instruction, Velluti ditched 'Cara mano dell'amore', the aria he preferred in Florence, and exchanged it for a transposed version of Tacchinardi's 'Popoli dell'Egitto'.

<sup>4</sup> More than this narrative rested on a castrato's provision. According to Stendhal's *Life of Rossini* (1824) Velluti had been responsible not only for the success of many prime donne, but also for a whole thrust of nineteenth-century song. An anecdote appeared in print only a few months after *Semiramide* premiered at Venice's La Fenice on 3 February 1823. By way of explaining the opera's vivid *canto d'agilità*, the author described how the composer had met Velluti in Milan a year after the successes of *Tancredi*. The occasion was *Aureliano in Palmira*, an opera prepared for the Teatro alla Scala in 1814. The male soprano was then at the height of his 'youth and vigour' and 'one of the handsomest men of his century'. At the second orchestral rehearsal, the voice that sounded to unschooled ears like a 'terra incognita' could be heard embroidering Arsace's second-act aria. Rossini found that his original – 'Perché mai le luci apriamo' – was so buried under Velluti's twists, turns and *gorgheggi*, that he decided there and then to end such license. From *Aureliano* on, Stendhal has Rossini resolving, 'every scrap of ornamentation, every vestige of a *fioritura*, will constitute an integral part of the song itself, and the whole lot, without exception, will be noted down in the score'. Thus, Stendhal explains, did



The generation of Balzac, Mendelssohn and Meyerbeer, in other words, imbued the figure of the castrato with its phantasmic charge.<sup>5</sup> Under their auspices, the whole notion of castration descended into a psychological or culturally repressed sphere. Historians of psychoanalysis, after all, would argue that castration anxiety emerged as the founding moment of adult sociability and subjectivity at this time. This period might be seen to have first articulated the phallus as the signifier (anticipating Freud/Lacan), the causative principle not only for gender differentiation but for the whole possibility of intersubjective desire. Their view of the castration complex, this neurotic vision of castration as Social Death, was foregrounded in the reception of Velluti in late 1820s London. Via his voice, psychoanalysis might say, castration emerged as the ghost haunting the Symbolic Order of our culture.

### Biology sings

Let me put this another way. Around 1829, the castrato as artistically creative, generative or productive – as Author – becomes anathema. In loose terms, he falls foul of a ‘biological’ shift in European culture – a turn away from the mechanistic or universalist epistemologies of the eighteenth century. This was an age in which the dynamic was privileged above the static: geology over mineralogy; cosmology over astronomy; processes over facts in history; the life sciences over the physical sciences; the natural over the mechanical; the analytic over the classificatory; exegesis over mimesis. An epistemological turn took place which upended the category of the ideal voice: where once the voice was assumed to be static, disembodied, pure and universal (as for the castrato), now it became grainy, powerful, bodily and individual. When singers sang, they no longer echoed some absolute emotion or some moral, ideal or mimetic state. Rather, they expressed themselves – their changing inner selves – and their own mental and material physiognomies from deep within. As creation was now seen more as a mode of (female) procreation out of the natural order than as an ex nihilo act of (male) production, so the male soprano

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Rossini wrest power away from the singer by taking it upon himself to write out arbitri, arresti and mezze cadenze. Behind the veneer of Rossini’s ‘second manner’ and his ‘revolution’ in vocal style (as witnessed in *Semiramide*), the anecdote suggests, there is pride, emptiness and the uncanny presence of a eunuch; see Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, trans. Richard N. Coe (London, 1985), 340. While it is common knowledge that the anecdote’s identification of a ‘revolution’ does not bear scrutiny in Rossini’s scores, audiences in the 1820s and 30s would have believed Stendhal’s story.

<sup>5</sup> I have borrowed this notion of the castrato’s ‘charge’ from Heather Hadlock, *Mad Loves: Women and Music in Offenbach’s Les Contes d’Hoffmann* (Princeton, 2000), 120.



became 'subhuman' – driven underground, forced below culture. Of course, the disembodied voice had been outlawed before, at different times by different social groups. But broadly speaking, the 'early modern voice' – once prized for its affective or 'phonetic' qualities – was finally forsaken in cosmopolitan Europe around the end of the 1820s. Above all else, the 'Romantic voice' (for want of a better term) was 'genetic', subservient to natural law and natural process. It had an organisation that was physiologically specific and bodily. What occurred (to borrow Kristevian terms) was a privileging of geno-song (the voice organic and substantial) over pheno-song (a poetic or 'ideal type' of phonation). A bio-medical view of singing emerged: where what was important was not so much a pure, unfettered vocal emission – as if it were radiating from the spheres. Rather, a powerful, charged and grainy extraction was preferred – as if the voice were expressing the body.

On a wider plane, this shift represented nothing less than a reordering of the human subject. It is commonly observed, particularly in literary studies, that 'Romanticism' involved privileging orders of difference over 'Enlightenment' principles of the universal. Yet to imply by this – as is frequently done – that Romanticism did away with humanism or any concept of human uniformity is to miss the point. Better to argue that a new conceptualisation of 'humanness' emerged at this time; an embodied view began to dominate that excluded the category of the male soprano. That the species ended up being projected below language was confirmed when another castrato, Pergetti, visited London in 1844. This was at a time when, as the *Musical World* put it, even 'the negroes of the British dominions have been placed in the class HUMAN'. The writer found Pergetti's performance so unspeakable that he could only comment in hieroglyphs: 'Sbgrmld – vxgspl – zb – tdpmbg – qz'.<sup>6</sup> This class of being, in other words, had moved outside representability. As Balzac put it, the castrato was a 'creature for which the human language [had] no name, a form without substance'.<sup>7</sup> Cut off from the emerging Truth, his unnatural vocalisations no longer made sense; his singing bore no relation to sympathetic law. Human expression was no longer to be reflected, mirrored, or exchanged back and forth in the manner of hard currency. Not so much grounded in abstractions such as the 'soul' or morality, human subjectivity now cleaved to the

<sup>6</sup> Signor Pergetti sung his own 'Quel tuo girar del ciglio' at a *Società Armonica* concert in the Hanover Square Rooms; see *The Musical World* (1844), 158.

<sup>7</sup> Honoré de Balzac, 'Sarrasine', in Roland Barthes, ed., *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (London, 1975), 221–54, 229.

body, the physical organisation of the brain-mind and the materiality of consciousness and emotions.<sup>8</sup> This earthly frame was not to be done away with or denied; the 'natural self', the individual body, was to be embraced as definitively and all-embracingly HUMAN.

Nowhere was the looming catastrophe of castration better illustrated than in an anecdote which began to circulate during the last decade of the eighteenth century. In it the biology of the voice asserts itself while a musico, Balani, is 'live' on stage. This episode is striking for the way in which it pinpoints the exact moment when the castrated voice fails. The shift from a mechanical to a biological ordering of the world occurs (perhaps surprisingly) on stage at the San Carlo in Naples.

This man [Balani] was born without any visible signs of those parts which are taken out in castration; an opinion, which was even confirmed by his voice.... One day, he exerted himself so uncommonly in singing an arietta, that all of a sudden those parts, which had so long been concealed by nature, dropped into their proper place. The singer at this very instant lost his voice, which became even perceptible in the same performance, and with it he lost every prospect of a future subsistence.<sup>9</sup>

There is a serious point to this anecdote. Not only did the castrato lose his job. Through over-exertion, he unwittingly shed his unnaturalness. As the Truth of his once concealed biology 'came out', so the singer was 'made proper'.

### From poetic to hermeneutic listening

To read a lapse in performance in this way is to tune into a different way of knowing. A reorientation was under way: the voice no longer obeys the physical principles of its own instrumentality. Rather, it obeys drives, urges. What becomes fascinating for listeners, no matter who the singer, is to extrapolate backwards: from the sonority heard, to the situation of the body that generated it. Listeners cease to find enjoyment in mere listening, surrounding themselves with the pleasure of the musical surface. The poetic, moral or ideal value of music is no longer at issue. Turning from what has become 'superficial', audiences increasingly read the voice as a trace of something else, as a symptom of an a priori nature, an expression of forces that had

<sup>8</sup> For more on the move from a mechanistic/dualistic universe to biological/embodied particularity, see Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge, 2000), 152.

<sup>9</sup> This incident was supposedly observed around 1765 and was told by Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz, *A Picture of Italy*, trans. Joseph Trapp (London, 1791) and is quoted in Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (London, 1960), 47.

come before. For them, this was a game of identification, a way of isolating and registering (embodied) difference in anOther. All sound needs to be motivated, to have an agency driving it forward. Something needs to be revolving, directing or controlling aural events. Phenomena do not exist on their own; there is always agency, meaning, personality, depth.

What this implies is that the listener engages every hermeneutic faculty in deciphering events behind the acoustic veneer. Since the voice is powerful and individual, it impinges on its hearers, crying out for interpretation. Listener and performer still possess and breathe into each other in an intimate, physical way (as they had in the eighteenth century). But a new level of absorption, of deep listening, is required to probe the meaning of this sounding object. Now that the voice exists as a trace, clue or some form of evidence, a desire to know – a penetrating curiosity – begins to characterise its reception.

In line with this shift, critics, physiologists and natural historians begin to sexualise the voice. Identifying a sexual charge in production, an obvious derivative of listening for its biology, became a prime preoccupation in the nineteenth century. In The Descent of Man, Charles Darwin claimed that the vocal organs had evolved in mankind as a way of propagating the species by sexual selection. 'Throughout the animal kingdom at large, the commencement of reproduction', he observed, coincides with an 'unusual vivacity of every kind, including vocal vivacity'.<sup>10</sup> The drive to song was engendered (in his view) by desire, biology and animal magnetism. Virtuosity – and here the stock nineteenth-century operatic heroine comes to mind – only added to the 'vivacity' of the preternatural cry. The throat, in other words, was 'revealed' in the nineteenth century to have a sexual density matched by its potent evolutionary force. More than any non-reproductive body part, it was heavily sexual.

### **The biology of music**

The period around 1829 was pivotal for singing, a time when what I will call the neo-classical or 'blank slate model' of the voice fell from grace. Radical changes in vocal technique were taking hold; alternative schooling methods were being tested across Europe. In the previous century, singers trained in fine declamation and messa di voce had spent their hours of practice ridding the voice of personal qualities,

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Richardson, British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind, 431.

unravelling its individualities, smoothing away distinctiveness and setting aside such impediments as texture, grain and personality. What *l'arte del canto* aimed at was unification: pure, unmodified vowels in all parts of the range, consistency of timbre throughout, unhindered flexibility and the cultivation of an imperceptible shift between chest and head registers. The *London Magazine* toed the old-fashioned line in 1825 when it lauded the 'artificial formation' of Velluti's tone. 'His *portamento* is exact', it wrote, 'no taint of nose, mouth, or throat, is discoverable in its production; nothing can be more perfect or more finished; there are no roughnesses, no inequalities'.<sup>11</sup> The perfect voice was an ether one could hear past and through. It was acoustically transparent, aurally luminous. What was sought after was an all-encompassing neutrality of tone, a pure release from a clean, solo source. Singing would be a process of effortless and delicate *effusion* or *emission* rather than a style of *expressive extraction* witnessed a short while later.

In his classic essay 'The Paradox of Acting' (1767) Diderot made the development of non-individuality the highest objective of art, when he listed the attributes of the actor graced with 'the gift of mimesis'. 'Perhaps it is just because he is nothing', the philosopher argued, 'that he is before all everything. His own particular form never interferes with the shape he assumes'.<sup>12</sup> The finished actor, like the finished singer, only found true form, Diderot speculated, once he had been emptied of self. To be the echo of every passion was to wipe the slate clean and to attain to a moral absolute: total insignificance. Nothingness was the actor's guarantee of perfection, and it could only be met with great devotion, sacrifice, and long periods of discipline and privation. To ensure beautiful and continuous song, bird-keeping manuals since Antonio Valli da Todi's *Il canto de gl'augelli* (1601) supplied detailed instructions on how best to blind its subjects.<sup>13</sup> The message was clear: every aspect of self had to be abstracted away. Another must take its place.

In a musical sense, of course, the *ne plus ultra* of the Diderotian ideal formed in the voice and figure of the castrato. Not only subject to the rigours of the *conservatorio*, such a non-person was ideal precisely because originary significance had been taken from him as a child. Since superfluous adult adjuncts had been cut

<sup>11</sup> See *The London Magazine* (July 1825), 474.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted and discussed in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 259.

<sup>13</sup> See Franca Trinchieri Camiz, 'The Castrato Singer: from Informal to Formal Portraiture', *Atribus et Historiae* 18/9 (1998), 171–86, 176.

away, he was free to cultivate a type of pure, 'natural' phonation – a vox perfecta – from a nascent position of 'first things'. Via a small act of violence, his body had been opened to every aesthetic possibility. Hypostatised as an object, his figure – this house of the living artwork – had a non-identity liberated from self. Living at the zero-point of subsistence, castrati, it was widely reported, had weak heartbeats, poor eyesight, almost no pulse and lacked blood pressure. Medically, their absence of inner heat, susceptible temperaments, pale countenances and enervated sensibilities bore out their emptiness of being. John Ebers, who had been manager of the King's Theatre from 1821 to 1827, reported how sparing Velluti was 'in the pleasures of the table; a cup of coffee and a little dry toast form his breakfast, and his other meals are in proportion'.<sup>14</sup> Compare this to Malibran who, it was widely reported, lived on breakfasts of oysters and port.<sup>15</sup> The castrato's levels of subsistence, critics observed, were negligible; there was very little original or proper to him. Whereas in the eighteenth century he had been celebrated as the overblown symbol of luxury; by the nineteenth he had become a pale, threadbare being.

In its best sense, castration was not only a reversion to a life of pre-pubescence (Velluti was regularly castigated in the press for his infantile temper and childlike personality); it was an advance on the road to the Ideal or the Universal Voice. A physical refinement had taken place which was not so much an act of mutilation as an opportunity to produce without hindrance, to lay aside and start afresh. As if to memorialise his 'conversion', a long poem in the Examiner in 1825 hearkened back to Velluti's 'second baptism' as a child.<sup>16</sup> More beautiful than woman, the evirato had seen his seed, his ability to procreate, exchanged for an ability to become somebody else in an ex nihilo act of (male) creation. His capacity to impersonate, to be everything, gave him tremendous virility. Far from sacrificing potentia generandi, he might acquire God-status, so endowed was he with the power

<sup>14</sup> John Ebers, Seven Years of the King's Theatre (London, 1828), 271.

<sup>15</sup> The Manchester Guardian of 1836 noted that she enjoyed a 'breakfast of a few oysters and some porter diluted with water, which she had always found, we understand, to be the best strengthening preparation for her great vocal exertions'; quoted in Memoirs Critical and Historical of Madame Malibran de Beriot (London, 1836), 25–6. Malibran failed to follow the advice of her brother, who suggested that singers 'should avoid excesses of all kinds: of diet, habits or conduct', including dried fruits and 'exciting drinks'; see Manuel Garcia, École de Garcia: Traité complet de l'Art du chant (1840), trans. Donald Paschke, 2 vols (New York, 1975), I, 5.

<sup>16</sup> The poem appeared as the lead article or 'advertisement' on the front page 'Velluti to his Revilers'. The six-column defence argued that to 'load him personally with abuse' was unfair. 'Why with curses load the sufferer?/ Was I the cause of what I mourn? Did I/ Unmake myself, and hug deformity?/ Did I, a smiling and trusting child.../ Call for the knife? And not resist in vain,/ With shrieks, convulsive and a fiery pain,/ That second baptism, bloody and profane'; see The Examiner 914 (7 August 1825), 495.



to create from nothing. More soberly, his model would be Hermes, the genderless messenger-god who merely carries, at no stage interfering with the swift execution of his task, his musical letters delivered fluently and without strain. The castrato's vocal flights served a higher, quasi-mythological function, bearing texts aloft on soft, spiritual wings and depositing them, effortlessly, into the ears of listeners. If not the bearer of letters, then the castrato might be seen as his own sign-system – the voice of logos – part of an empty grammatical system awaiting signification or meaningful drawing-together. More pointedly, he might embody Music Itself. The *Athenaeum* in 1828, for example, made clear that Velluti was 'a being with a soul breathing nothing but music'.<sup>17</sup> Music, like 'him', could be interpreted as 'castrated', since it has no substance, no form or meaning of its own. It only *becomes* when shaped linguistically, acted out, mimed. All in all, the singer in ideal form – Velluti at his best – was the blank that signifies, inviting his audience always and everywhere to inscribe their passions back on him. The perfect mirror of every figure and every form, Velluti echoed those six sharply defined Cartesian emotions – wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness – without distortion. The listener sang through him, as it were, his passions sung back to him through another mouth. Pace modern erotic notions of the castrato, he was not in the classical sense an object of desire – nor of repulsion. He in no way expressed himself or some inner sex, impulse or feeling. Rather, he expressed Others, or, more widely, that fixed economy of finite Universal Emotions. With Velluti, a whiteness of the voice occurs (hence the term, *voce bianca*), a frozen world, where prohibition and desire are yet to be born.<sup>18</sup> To be all, to embody meaning, Diderot would argue, one must make oneself nothing.

### **The opaque form of the contralto**

If the castrato dropped beneath the 'window of culture' around this time, then roughly the same may be said of another eminently neoclassical figure, the female contralto. Were dates to be put to it, Diderot's 'woman of genius' can be said to have taken centre stage at the Italian opera in 1806 with Marchesi's retirement and Adelaïde Malanotte's debut. (Of the castrati, only Crescentini in Paris and Velluti were left in the top flight.) 'When women have genius', Diderot had argued in his

<sup>17</sup> *The Athenaeum* 39 (23 July 1828), 621.

<sup>18</sup> This voice is usefully described in Roland Barthes, 'Music, Voice, Language', (1977), *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford, 1985), 275–85, 280.



influential 'Essai sur les Femmes', 'I believe they bear more of an original stamp of it than we do'.<sup>19</sup> The preferred medium of vocal expression became female, as tastes all across Europe fell into line with Diderot's postulation. Female ascendancy at the opera around this time, as we shall see, occurred because women were seen to stand closer to Nature than their male counterparts.

The female contralto both resembled and was dissimilar to the castrato. Descriptions of womanly character in the first two decades of the century continued to imagine her as a degenerate or passive homology of the male. Because the ability to impersonate depended on a certain involuntary blankness, she proved excellently engineered for mimesis. A passive flatness, which smoothed over her as yet indistinct vegetality, lent her to artifice and play-acting in the manner of the *primo uomo*, a figure who was now on his last legs. While her voice was never fully as 'imitative', it did preserve what Rossini called the castrato's 'ideal and expressive' legacy.<sup>20</sup> So, on the one hand, women took up where the male soprano left off. On the other, they were more than merely his stand-in, more than a substitute for an unproductive masculine type. Rather, they represented a point of arrival, a privileged new subject position in culture.

Shifts in the history of female sexuality, however, have obscured the value of this historical achievement by positing this woman as a transitional figure separating the age of the castrato from what came to be known as 'Romantic Opera'. From the point of view of the future – from the perspective of the 1830s – the voices of these formidable females were ambiguously sexed. For later tastes, the problem was that they were, frankly, unattractive. Appearance – physical appearance – was no longer insignificant to the musical experience (listeners no longer went through performances blind). Singers of the ilk of Pasta and Pisaroni were not yet 'fully woman' in the organic sense of Sontag or Malibran, who rose to fame during the late 1820s. (Whereas audiences would throw texts, poems or sonnets at Pasta or Pisaroni after operas, flowers – organic, natural objects – would fall at the feet of the first modern divas.) Before the attractions of Sontag and Malibran, in other words, voice types were still classified not according to biology or gender, but according to idealities. As late as 25 January 1830 Francesco Bennati, the great pioneer of physiological studies of singing, identified three voices in human existence. These

<sup>19</sup> Cited in Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, 263.

<sup>20</sup> Rossini used these words in a letter to the Italian music critic Filippo Filippi of 26 August 1868; see Rodolfo Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, trans. Frederick Fuller (Oxford, 1991), 136.

were separable by range only: sopranos-sfogati; tenors-contraltini and basses-taille.<sup>21</sup> The ENT specialist's sexual blindness, betrayed here in a paper given to the Académie Royale des Sciences, replicated the time-honoured models of the ancients. Bennati – it seems – could not shake the weighty traditions of the past; he had studied singing, after all, under the great castrato Gasparo Pacchierotti.

Even Pasta, not a contralto in the true sense, perpetuated the classic ideal, particularly during her peak in the early and mid-1820s. As long as she held court, the femme grecque ideal of le code Rossinien would remain. Critics hailed her as the ultimate animate artwork: immovable, statuesque and permanent. The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review's description of the attitude she took while listening to Leicester (Curioni) in Coccia's Maria Stuart, Regina di Scozia on 7 June 1827 was typical:

The attitude was so perfect – was taken with such slow and solemn stillness, and kept with such immovable beauty, that we never recollect to have seen such a personification of the attributes and effects of sculpture; and if art is employed in the imitation of nature, here it seemed as if nature had been turned towards sculpture for her model and authority.<sup>22</sup>

Metamorphosing from one attitude to another, Pasta – according to Stendhal – copied the sculpted poses of the actor, de' Marini, and of Viganò's principal ballerina, Pallerini.<sup>23</sup> Her style was perfectly matched to the firmness particularly Rossini scripted into his characters.

Like the castrati before her, Pasta was an impersonator. While her womanness was not exactly in doubt, her genius hinged on an ability to hide this aspect of her person. She was of that malleable, plastic sort of sex that was in no way significant to her acting parts. Her success in en travesti parts only underlined the essential mutability of her form; intrinsic, personal beauty was of no matter. When Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley wrote to the Examiner to protest at the language it had used to attack Velluti in 1826, she took the opportunity to point out what she felt to be Pasta's chief shortcoming. Her style, the author of Frankenstein pointed out,

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<sup>21</sup> Francesco Bennati, Recherches sur le mécanisme de la voix humaine (Paris, 1832), xii.

<sup>22</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 9 (1827), 54.

<sup>23</sup> Stendhal, Life of Rossini, 385–6.

'wants the "touch of nature"'.<sup>24</sup> Her pathos was artificial and severe to a fault; or, as John Ebers put it in 1828:

There is no perceptible effort to resemble the character she plays; on the contrary, she enters the stage [as] the character itself; transposed into the situation, excited by the hopes and the fears, breathing the life and the spirit of the being she represents.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, in *Rose et Blanche*, a novella co-written by George Sand and Jules Sandeau in 1831, the protagonist recognises Pasta only at the beginning of the last act of *Tancredi*. 'Rose let out a cry of surprise', the novel runs, 'this handsome warrior – this was a young woman who shook the pale Rose – here was the revelation! *Tancredi* was Judith Pasta'.<sup>26</sup> Such surprise at the actress' presence was echoed in the *Examiner* when it hailed Pasta's Nina:

Her voice is veiled.... She is of the Bolognese school of art – no glancing lights, no meretricious expression, no extravagance, no violent contrast, – she goes straight on to her end, and arrives at it. She does not shine in parts, but in the aggregate impression – the whole is well-balanced, continuous, firm.... She gives herself entirely up to the impression of her part, loses her power over herself, is led away by her feelings wither [sic] to an expression of stupor or of artless joy, borrows beauty from deformity, charms unconsciously, and is transformed into the very being she represents. She does not act the character – she is it, looks it, breathes it ... her whole style and manner is perfect keeping, as if she were really a love-sick, care-crazed maiden, occupied with one deep sorrow, and who had no other idea or interest in the world.<sup>27</sup>

Stendhal too was obsessed by the firmness of her features, the way she projected the *bello ideale*, the *pacatezza* (sedateness) of her phonation and her arcane, 'celestial beauty'.<sup>28</sup> What was most celebrated in her art – her narrow vocal range notwithstanding – was her ability to deny nature and breath every character into life. Not so much a creation from within nature, Pasta was a statuesque, artificial and masterly creation from without.

In the 1820s, the sublimated beauty of this Ideal followed in the footsteps of her ailing sibling, the castrato. Her song, her elevated speech, was no longer absolute.

<sup>24</sup> Her letter, signed 'Anglo-Italicus' was dated 29 May 1826; see *The Examiner* 958 (11 June 1826), 372.

<sup>25</sup> Ebers, *Seven Years of the King's Theatre*, 219–20.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Enid M. Standring, 'Rossini and his Music in the Life and Works of George Sand', *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 10/1 & 2 (1981/2), 17–27, 21.

<sup>27</sup> See *The Examiner* 953 (7 May 1826), 292.

<sup>28</sup> See Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, 373–83.

Both the sound of her voice and her en travesti tendencies could be positively off-putting. To 'express manly sentiments of love and attachment in the acute sounds of the additional keys', in anything 'additional' to the male register, the New Monthly Magazine found in 1826 was 'preposterous and ridiculous, whether such sounds proceed from eunuchs, or from females in male disguise'. The critic continued: 'Let us have Nature; let us have all that Nature will afford for our enjoyment – mental or physical. What is beyond, is evil'.<sup>29</sup>

Pasta left London on 2 August 1828 after a disastrous year dogged by illness, Sontagmanie and performances of Armando that failed to live up to Velluti's example.<sup>30</sup> When Ayrton summed up the season, he wrote that 'Pasta's magnetic powers have deserted her, and none but Madlle Sontag has drawn the crowd'.<sup>31</sup> The Athenaem of that year complained that her voice 'is still naturally defective, naturally so, especially in its lower tones, which are not only husky, but so weak, that some will scarcely pass the orchestra to the nearest ear in the pit'.<sup>32</sup> Even Pasta fell victim to the vogue for projected, powerful singing. Nine months later, around the time of Mendelssohn's nightmare, she was plying her trade in far-off Milan.

As listeners in London preferred geno-song to pheno-song, so the squat physicality of those contraltos bequeathed to cosmopolitan Europe by the 1810s – Malanotte, Grassini, Pisoni – became disconcerting. Pisoni being engaged at the King's Theatre in 1829, the Harmonicon chose the occasion of her benefit to criticise 'her hard masculine voice' when she sang Arsace opposite Sontag's Semiramide. 'With a full consciousness of her merits', the critic confessed, 'we always witness her

<sup>29</sup> The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal (Feb. 1826), 57. Gottlieb Lewis Engelbach wrote for the New Monthly Magazine in 1823 and 1829–30; see Leanne Langley, 'The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century', Ph.D. diss. (University of North Carolina, 1983), 527.

<sup>30</sup> On Rossini's recommendation, Meyerbeer had recomposed Il crociato in Egitto for Pasta in a Parisian version, which premiered at the Théâtre Italien on 25 September 1825. Pasta brought this production to London in 1828, a Pisoni number from Meyerbeer's L'esule di Granata (Milan, 1821), 'Ah, come rapida', interpolated as her second-act aria. This interpolation had already been made for Carolina Bassi in Trieste (Autumn, 1824), but now it boasted a new recitative, 'Eccomi giunto', a cabaletta 'L'aspetto adorabile' probably by Nicolini and a new position in the act; see Don White, 'Meyerbeer in Italy', the booklet accompanying Il crociato in Egitto (London: Opera Rara CD, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> The Harmonicon 6 (1828), 155. In 1828, Velluti played Armando only a few weeks after Pasta's benefit in the same role. At least one journal argued for Velluti's superiority 'both in respect to the polish of vocal art and of his acting', all the while hinting that 'Pasta undertook the part with reluctance'. 'We have before observed that Madame Pasta confides too much in mere volume of voice when urged to any trial of skill', the critic continued, 'but Velluti's peculiar tone is not to be overwhelmed, and his polish only appears the more beautiful by the contrast with the comparative coarseness which attends any preternatural exertion of the voice'; see The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 10 (1828–30), 72–3.

<sup>32</sup> The Athenaeum 5 (29 January 1828), 76.

performance with pain'.<sup>33</sup> Harriet Granville made a nastier assessment of her in a letter to her sister in 1827:

On Saturday we had Pisaroni, magnificent, wonderful, entraînant, electrifying Pisaroni. Hideous, distorted, deformed, dwarfish Pisaroni. Add it up, dearest Sissee, divide, subtract, multiply, it is capable of all for it is marvellous. She has an immense head, a remarkably ugly face. When she smiles or sings her mouth is drawn up to her ear, with a look of a person convulsed with pain. She has two legs that stand out like sugar tongs, one shorter than the other. Her stomach sticks out on one side of her body, and she has a hump on the other, not where stomachs or humps usually are, but sideways, like paniers [sic].<sup>34</sup>

The desire to 'divide, subtract, multiply', to locate Pisaroni in terms of her 'singing parts', threw her undeniable vocal excellence into disarray. The great contralto's technique of forcing her mouth to the left on high notes – a style discussed at length by Bennati – became curiously injurious to her success.<sup>35</sup> It was no longer enough to represent emotion allegorically or through wonder. Rather, singing now laid bare expression: the veracity of emotions became both acoustically and physiognomically 'visible'.

As scientists grew interested in the language of involuntary cries, spontaneous exhalations, sobs, coughs and stuttering as evidence of emotional truth, so ordinary audience members began to listen for natural processes in the voice. When Velluti – in his capacity as director – engaged one of his protégées, Giovanna Bonini, as prima donna at the King's Theatre in 1826, he no doubt looked forward to singing 'Ravvisa qual'alma' with her. This celebrated duet was the highlight of the 1824 Florentine version of Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto* and one of the castrato's showpieces. A rondò finale for Armando had ended the original Venetian version of the opera, which had premiered only eight weeks before this second production. In Florence, the presence of Adelaide Tosi meant that Meyerbeer and Velluti favoured a duet to the original rondò. In London, a year later, the castrato having shipped the set designs, costumes and music over from Florence with Meyerbeer's blessing,

<sup>33</sup> *The Harmonicon* 7 (1829), 150.

<sup>34</sup> Harriet Granville was the wife of the British ambassador in Paris in 1828. The letter was dated 28 May 1827; see Virginia Surtees, ed., *A Second Self. The Letters of Harriet Granville (1810–45)* (Salisbury, 1990), 220.

<sup>35</sup> See Bennati, *Recherches sur le mécanisme*, 26. This was Cox's recollection: 'Without exception this lady was the most ugly woman that was ever seen on the opera-stage; her appearance indeed was almost revolting. Besides the plainness of her face, she also limped, her figure was distorted, and her stature was short and squat'; see John Edmund Cox, *Musical Recollections of the Last Half-Century*, 2 vols (London, 1872), I, 168.



Maria Caradori-Allan had partnered Velluti in this climactic moment to great acclaim.<sup>36</sup> The New Monthly Magazine exalted the blend of Caradori's 'clear tones' with the castrato's 'penetrating soprano'. 'Let [the] duet with Velluti at the very conclusion of the opera be listened to', the critic enthused, 'and no more be said'.<sup>37</sup> Before the King's Theatre revival of 1826, in other words, the duet's reputation was second to none.

With Bonini in tow, however, the number's standing faltered, the problem being that, as Richard Bacon put it, the prima donna was 'old, exceedingly plain, and took snuff'. In her duets with him, Velluti had taken to forcing her to 'stand through the scene with her eyes fixed on his face, and if possible with both her hands in his, that she might be guided in her performance by his slightest look or movement, and she perfectly understood his signals, for she was an excellent musician'.<sup>38</sup> An extraordinary passage in the London Magazine laid into this sycophantic gesturing. Reading her body through her voice, the critic found Bonini's muscular lyricism painful to experience; watching her sing was like watching the most elemental emission:

The severe struggle with which she draws a thin and wiry note ab imo pectore, and the awkward pain with which she delivers herself of it, can only be likened to one operation in nature. She obviously labours under a vocal constipation. The pencil of Cruikshank can alone do justice to the distress of the poor Signora in the popular duet in the finale of the *Crociato*. We cannot describe the effect of Velluti, with his tall figure bending over the little lady, and holding her up by the hand as if to life her over the gamut, as a careful father lifts little miss over the gutter; then, when the time comes for the high note, the manager seems to coax, wheedle, and encourage her for a violent squeeze; the hand is carried up by jerks to its highest possible elevation, and the voice appears, by some curious attraction, to follow

<sup>36</sup> There is little doubt that the castrato and his manager, Giovanni Fradelloni, travelled with this work to England in 1825. In John Ebers' words, Velluti had 'brought with him, from Florence, designs for the scenery, dresses, &c.'; see Ebers, *Seven Years*, 266. Meyerbeer had written this duet for Florence's Teatro della Pergola to substitute for 'Ah! che fate', Armando's original rondò finale composed for Velluti at the Venice premiere.

<sup>37</sup> The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal 15/56 (August 1825), 345.

<sup>38</sup> See Richard Mackenzie Bacon, his signature collection, Cambridge University Library, Manuscripts Add. 6,245, 18v. On 19 July 1828, Velluti again assumed the role of teacher when he sang the same duet with Sontag in a new production of *Il crociato*. The press criticised, among other things, Palmide's 'immense turban'. 'We must protest against the stage being made a conservatorio, or Armando d'Orville being reduced to a singing master', one critic added. 'Signor Velluti's exertions towards the good order of the performance were incessant; the choruses, the principal personages, nay, Mademoiselle Sontag herself, had the full benefit of his assistance, to which even his prayers to heaven formed no interruption, as, with his hands clasped and his eyes turned upwards, he, nevertheless, continued to beat time most perceptibly'; The Athenaeum 39 (23 July 1828), 621.

it, and at the critical moment no one but the artist we have named can do justice to the awkward anxiety of the struggling Prima Donna's countenance.<sup>39</sup>

This harsh form of natural-physical attack on singers – castrati as well as contralti – became routine in the late 1820s, not only in satirical print, but in pictures.



Plate 4. Louis Marks' depiction of Velluti;  
The British Museum, Prints and Drawings, Caricatures 6/14,880.

The engraving 'An Italian singer, cut out for English amusement; or, Signor Veluti [sic] Displaying his Great parts' circulated in 1825. The military officer in the centre of the picture exclaiming 'do you not think he's a well made man!' is probably the Duke of Wellington, one of Velluti's keenest fans. In radical culture, the political explanation typically given for the success of the castrato in the 1820s was that he serviced the repressive tastes of the ruling elite. 'Cut out' for their amusement, he was seen to mirror and exemplify aristocratic dandyism and effeminacy. The Times made clear that whilst Velluti might preen the feathers of the higher orders, he was

<sup>39</sup> The London Magazine (March 1826), 316.

below the tastes of what it called 'the manly British public'.<sup>40</sup> Louis Marks (a contemporary of master-satirist George Cruikshank) depicts the castrato showing off 'his parts' (displaying that manuscript in his right hand). Something vital, it is clear, is missing from the scene. As the standing lady in the back row with her lorgnette points out, Velluti is 'not quite' complete.

### **The procreating eunuch: touching the void**

The castrato's reception in London was dogged by this awareness of the fundamental lack at his core. His tall, thin features; smooth, glistening skin; that pale and beardless membrane; high, narrow shoulders; arched back; rounded hips and fine wrinkles ringing the eyes; all covered over the nagging void. For the Romantics, as we have seen, the castrato lacked the basic materials from which to create. He possessed an engrossing strangeness that thrust him outside the human: an emptiness that made him seem at once animal and machine-like. The New Times condemned Velluti for attacking 'the manliness of our [Britain's] national character'. The writer continued: 'He stands forward as living evidence of the lamentable extent to which human nature has been degraded in order to satisfy human sensuality.... It is not to be borne with patience, that for the sake of such an exhibition, the mind of a young and virtuous female should be exposed to the consequences of dangerous curiosity and vicious insinuation'.<sup>41</sup> Since the first principles of production were missing, any creative generation on the eunuch's part was unthinkable.

Listeners wanted to expose his lie, strip him down and uncover his deception. There they would find not that he was nothing, but rather that he was something, a terrible something-without. His was a figure of tremendous, repressed pain; his outward form muffled a raucous, screaming silence. Because of his mutilation – in an inhuman twist – he was apparently barred from protesting the injustice he had faced; vocal resistance was pathetic, shrill. Shorn of biology, his was a reality of pure, acid pain (of the kind later revealed in Wagner's *Klingsor*, a role originally conceived for castrato, Domenico Mustafà).<sup>42</sup> In the 1820s Velluti's voice began to recall a hollow, gutless past of old mores, powdered exteriors and false-faced aristocrats in court shoes.

<sup>40</sup> See a commentary on this in The London Magazine (August 1825), 517.

<sup>41</sup> See New Times 8,401 (1 July 1825), 2e.

<sup>42</sup> Mustafà was born in a village near Perugia on 14 April 1829. He was just over a month old on the night Mendelssohn dreamt about Velluti in London.

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In the midst of the hype surrounding Velluti's public debut and the first London performance of *Il crociato in Egitto* in 1825, the *Times* orchestrated a full-blown press war.<sup>43</sup> On the morning of the English premiere (30 June), the newspaper printed a stinging denunciation. 'Some savage', the *London Magazine* reported, 'took the trouble to translate the brutal article in The Times of the Thursday, and sent it to Velluti' just before curtain-up.<sup>44</sup> The public took up the newspaper's goading, having never witnessed a vocal species of this type since the days of the second-rate appearances of Neri and Roselli in 1800. As the *Examiner* put it, they 'anticipated a disturbance'.<sup>45</sup> That evening, the King's Theatre was packed with the most fashionable of patrons. A party dining at Apsley House led by the Duke of Wellington was in attendance, as was the extravagant Lord Maryborough and 'a lady for whom we feel too much compassion to mention her name' (as the *Times* put it). (This was probably Byron's famous ex-lover, the notorious Lady Carolyn Lamb, who was separating from her husband in June and July.)<sup>46</sup>

A delay of several minutes heightened the mood of anticipation before Velluti's entry, as the scene was prepared. Armando's ship eventually docking in the port of Damietta, the castrato stepped timidly down the galley to 'mingled applause and disapprobation'. The *Times* reported how he 'trembled excessively' before bowing 'respectfully to the audience'. 'The most profound silence reigned in one of the most crowded audiences I ever saw, broken on his entering by loud applauses of encouragement', wrote Lord Mount Edgumbe. 'The first note he uttered', he recalled from his box, 'gave a shock of surprise, almost of disgust, to inexperienced ears'. Ebers recoiled at the 'preternatural harshness' of Velluti's first words, which jarred 'even more strongly on the imagination than on the ear'. The *New Monthly Magazine* detected in the shrillness of his voice an 'extremely nervous state' brought about by having to oversee two last-minute rehearsals the previous day. 'The most grave of Velluti's supporters', the *Times* rejoined, 'could not conquer their inclination for laughter'. Velluti responded to an attempt to encore the famous first act trio,

<sup>43</sup> According to Ebers, Velluti wanted to appear in Morlacchi's *Tebaldo e Isolina* on his debut. Ayrton, who was director at the time, persuaded him to favour Meyerbeer; see Ebers, *Seven Years of the King's Theatre*, 260. Ayrton's enthusiasm for Meyerbeer was probably encouraged by Wellington himself. 'The Duke of W-, we have reason to know', the *London Magazine* reported, 'sent for Mr Ayrton into his box at the Opera, and threatened to shut up the House, if *Il crociato* was not got up with all speed'; *The London Magazine* (July 1825), 475.

<sup>44</sup> *The London Magazine* (August 1825), 517.

<sup>45</sup> *The Examiner* 909 (3 July 1825), 417.

<sup>46</sup> *The Times* 12,644 (1 July 1825), 3d.



'Giovinetto cavalier', by re-entering the stage in an attitude of humility. An uproar ensued, led by those wishing to sabotage the repeat. 'Certain imitations of his voice, proceeding chiefly from the gallery', the Times observed, 'defeated the intention'. 'For a few moments he appeared overwhelmed, and as if crouching for mercy', the London Magazine added, 'but, after a short time, he drew himself up and folded his arms, with the air of one whose spirit was roused by unjust and barbarous treatment'. Taking 'Caradori by the hand, he stepped forward, cast a most imploring look towards the audience ... and retired'. By the final act, the gallery had taken to singing back to him in mocking high catcalls whenever he made his entry. After a long and eventful night, the curtain finally fell in a tumult; the house emptied in anticipation of the ballet.<sup>47</sup>

The mob in the gallery responded to his voice in more or less psychosomatic terms. It was as though his tone was the cause or symptom of some terrible illness. 'A hero, a valiant crusader, a soldier, a victor, and a lover, venting his emotions in a squalling treble, singing of valour and glory as it were in a consumption, and making love in a feeble voice, higher than the mistress of his affection', the Examiner complained, 'was more than we could well endure'.<sup>48</sup> As if to confirm the singer as a consumptive, some reviewers speculated that his voice carried an awful contagion. When he sang, he only recalled the slicing of the knife, that formative moment in his youth.<sup>49</sup> 'There was something in the voice of Velluti', the Times reported, 'which, mingled with the reflection on his situation, really set the teeth on edge; and people were heard to suck up the breath as if in pain'.<sup>50</sup> Reviewing the 1826 production of *Il crociato*, the London Magazine found it 'painful to our sense of hearing to listen to Velluti's singing, as it is to our sense of sight to see a man standing insecurely on a dizzy height'. The vertigo of having to deal with the constant deferral of 'natural' resolution was particularly unbearable when the castrato's voice apparently cracked

<sup>47</sup> This account is compiled from the following sources: New Times 8,401 (1 July 1825), 2e; The London Magazine (August 1825), 517; The Times 12,644 (1 July 1825), 3d; Ebers, Seven Years of the King's Theatre, 268; and The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal (August 1825), 517. Lord Mount Edgumbe's words appear in Heriot, The Castrati in Opera, 195–6.

<sup>48</sup> The Examiner 909 (3 July 1825), 417.

<sup>49</sup> In 1829, the Harmonicon printed some 'Observations on Song', by a Dr Beattie, who, apart from opposing the male and female voice, was drawn into discussing 'a third species of musical sound'. 'For may it not be affirmed with truth, that no person of uncorrupted taste ever heard, for the first time, the music I allude to', the doctor questioned, 'without some degree of horror; proceeding not only from the disagreeable ideas suggested by what was done before his eyes, but also from the thrilling sharpness of tone that had startled his ear?'; see The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 156.

<sup>50</sup> The Times (2 July 1825), 3e.

momentarily. 'The Signor frequently loses command of his voice', the critic explained, 'and bitterly does it then grate on our musical nerves, like the scraping of a slate pencil, or the chromatic performance of a grinder on the edge of a saw'.<sup>51</sup> Whereas, in its prime, Velluti's voice was greeted with cries of 'viva il coltello!' (long live the knife!), there were now shouts of laughter. The Atlas critic complained that he had tried to educate his ear by persevering 'night after night' with Velluti, having expected 'by repeated doses to cure our nausea'. 'The more our ears took in', the critic admitted, 'the more we sickened'.<sup>52</sup>

What made listeners particularly queasy was his epicene gender. Talk amongst the Romantics had it that the castrato was attempting to pass himself off as a woman. Heavy censorship in the papal principalities of a backward Italy, it was thought, had forced these poor simulacra into existence. This was the Balzacian view: that the eunuch was a creature desperately seeking fulfilment as a female. Why else would Velluti display what the Harmonicon described as such 'morbid antipathy' towards the fairer sex?<sup>53</sup> The fact that he had been a lady-killer in his prime was now long forgotten. Only dim memories remained of him fleeing Milan in the wake of Rossini's Aureliano in Palmira (an opera written in 1814 for him) after a scandalous affair with a young lady of good standing (recorded in accounts of Velluti's biography as the Marchesa Clelia G-).<sup>54</sup> In ten years, his voice had become both mocking and jealous of the sex he secretly admired. The female's excess of life, vitality and proximity to nature, apparently, accounted for his every display of envy, competitiveness and misogyny.

The 'woman issue' dealt several damaging blows to Velluti's career. His engagement as director of the King's Theatre in 1826, for example, suffered as a result. In the wake of his benefit of that year, Velluti neglected to hand bonuses to the women in the chorus. Hauled before Middlesex county court on charges of 'sordid and grasping conduct', the castrato was foiled by the articulate plea of one of the young women, the timely intervention of Pasta on behalf of the chorus, and what the judge described as his own 'trumpety defence'.<sup>55</sup> During the dispute, the press took

<sup>51</sup> The London Magazine (March 1826), 315.

<sup>52</sup> The Atlas (18 June 1826), 74.

<sup>53</sup> The Harmonicon 4 (1826), 164.

<sup>54</sup> See Heriot, The Castrati in Opera, 192.

<sup>55</sup> See George Hogarth, Memoirs of the Opera in Italy, France, Germany, and England, 2 vols (London, 1851), I, 311. The Morning Post featured an exchange of letters between the parties on 10, 11 and 21

the opportunity both to leap to the aid of the oppressed and jump on Velluti. For at least one commentator, the 'extraordinary brevity' of the girl's petticoats on any given night at the opera was the most obvious measure of the director's 'screwing down' and exploitative tendencies.<sup>56</sup> Needless to say, the castrato was not re-engaged at the King's Theatre the following season.

Velluti's anti-women reputation was not improved by his championing of Bonini. 'If Signor Velluti had his way', the Atlas remarked in reference to the chorus dispute, 'we should not see a woman on the stage, unless one, perhaps, as old and as ugly as original Sin'.<sup>57</sup> Elsewhere, in a review of her *Cenerentola*, the same critic found it hard to believe that the hero would fall for 'a lodging-house char-woman'. 'If the Prince wanted a maid of all work to scrub and scour his palace', the correspondent explained, 'he could not have made a more prudent choice'.<sup>58</sup> Still in that year, the London Magazine protested at the decline of 'the Star of Venus' at the opera and savaged the 'brace of effete old women, whose voices do not gain even by comparison with the manager's'.<sup>59</sup> Since attractive women had disappeared under Velluti's management, the opera house was becoming a confusing place. Edward Holmes commented on the 1826 production of Aureliano in Palmira with Bonini as Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra and Velluti as Arsace:

Madame Bonini wore an immense sword by her side, which she, on certain occasions, drew, and carried about the stage in the stirring attitude of a kitchen poker. Her use of this substantial tool reminded us of Cinderella.... At the conclusion of the second scene of the *Aureliano*, and before the third began, a figure nearly six feet high, clad in robes of virgin-white, and wearing a fine black bushy beard, came on and sung for a good space.... The party in question may be a gentleman; for really, as things are ordered now at the Opera, there is no making out the sexes. The gentleman look very lady-like, and the ladies are so hard-favoured, that we no longer know how to distinguish the one from the other. They ought to be labelled like decanters, for fear of mistakes.

The virgin-white figure without the label was, of course, Velluti.

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July 1826; whilst the Harmonicon railed against his 'contemptuous and oppressive conduct'; The Harmonicon 4 (1826), 103 and 164-5.

<sup>56</sup> A chorus girl's salary stood at 5s 9½d per night, out of which she was required to buy shoes, gloves and flowers adapted to her roles, and attend rehearsals from 9:30am to 5pm. Velluti had agreed to up male salaries to 15s per night; but it was only after Pasta's intervention that female salaries matched less than half of theirs: 7s per engagement; see The Atlas 1/10 (23 July 1826), 155a.

<sup>57</sup> The Atlas 1/10 (23 July 1826), 154c.

<sup>58</sup> The Atlas (11 June 1826), 58c.

<sup>59</sup> The London Magazine (March 1826), 316.

The lobby against effeminacy, dandyism, extravagant male attire and cross-dressing became powerful and vocal by the late 1820s. 'Let your dress be as cheap', warned Tory radical William Cobbett in his Advice to Young Men of 1829, 'as may be without shabbiness'.<sup>60</sup> Given his lavish dress sense, Velluti became an obvious target for scorn. Several melodramatic imitations of him appeared in theatres all over London. J. Russell, for example, played Arionetti in The Son-in-Law at Drury Lane, making, as the Courier noted, 'a capital imitation of Velluti in a Recitative.... Every species of theatrical ingenuity had been resorted to, for the purpose of rendering the outward appearance of Mr Russell as feminine as possible: his very plain face was carefully rouged; full flowing ringlets fell upon his high shoulders, a timid step and childish gait'.<sup>61</sup> The Examiner, to cite another critique, pulled apart the castrato's lady-like crusader-garb in Il crociato. The hero's 'lank face, hid up in a helmet with a most injudicious bow of white satin ribbon on the tip of his chin', the radical paper summed up, 'seemed to have been dressed up by his enemies to look as ridiculous and effeminate as they could make him'.<sup>62</sup> Such imprudence was not becoming of a self-made man. Mean, arrogant, peevish, vain and sartorial to boot – the worst thing about Velluti was that he was a female substitute. He made woman despicable – undermining them at every opportunity. Worse still, he corrupted desire for them by poisoning the male imagination against them. In Sarrasine, Balzac has the sculptor despairing: 'I shall forever think of this imaginary woman when I see a real woman'. Screaming at this fake feminine object, he chokes: 'Monster! You who gave life to nothing. For me, you have wiped women from the earth'.<sup>63</sup> This was Velluti's most heinous crime: he sabotaged sexual appetite.

### Music and the exotic machine

Since the castrato threatened desire, he put the whole created order in jeopardy, not only because of the fact of his existence, but because of his music. A range of

<sup>60</sup> See William Cobbett, Advice to Young Men (London, 1829), n.p. Cobbett scorned wasting money on 'the decoration of the body'. His utilitarian views emerged in such statements as: 'Men are estimated by other men according to their capacity and willingness to be useful'. He had a high regard for female tolerance: 'Female eyes are ... very sharp: they can discover beauty though half hidden by a beard, and even by dirt, and surrounded by rags'; see also David Kuchta, 'The Making of the Self-Made Man: Class, Clothing, and English Masculinity, 1688–1832', Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, ed., The Sex of Things (Berkeley, 1996), 54–78.

<sup>61</sup> The Courier 10,568 (3 October 1825), 3b and also The Times 12,774 (3 October 1825), 2e.

<sup>62</sup> The Examiner 909 (3 July 1825), 417.

<sup>63</sup> Balzac, 'Sarrasine', 252.

historical evidence survives to suggest the uncanniness of Velluti's vocal manner. Fortunately, this last great survivor left behind him one of the most complete records of his school's methods of performance. That he rubbed shoulders with Rossini and Meyerbeer allows his style to be usefully compared with more familiar singers and practices. Add to this that the castrato helped Manuel Garcia (son of the tenor and brother of Malibran) publish a detailed guide to the performance of an aria from Morlacchi's *Tebaldo e Isolina* in 1847 and the evidence mounts (see Plate 5).<sup>64</sup>

'Caro suono lusinghier' occurred in the last act of an opera Morlacchi had composed in 1822 for La Fenice. In the introductory scena written for Velluti, 'Notte tremenda', a suicidal Tebaldo despairs of his separation from Isolina and fears her dead. As events turn towards the *romanza*, he thinks he hears her strumming a harp. The sound of this off-stage instrument, in fact, induces him to recall the first time he heard her playing and singing, the moment he fell in love with the daughter of his mortal enemy. This recollection dates back to an episode in the long *Introduzione* to Gaetano Rossi's libretto, which set the scene for the main action. 'Caro suono lusinghier', in other words, hearkened back to a pre-historical moment, to a framing narrative, where Tebaldo unwittingly fell in love with the voice of Isolina. Memory, melancholy and delusion, to put it another way, made sense of this episode by gesturing to a return, to an imagined event preparatory or external to the operatic plot.

The song was the most engaging of the opera. Ebers recalled how it 'enchained' and 'enthralled' in London, not only because of Morlacchi's evocative use of the orchestra, but because of the visual spectacle accompanying the music. Its moonlit scene aroused fascination, the alterity or otherness of which, Ebers wrote, bound the audience 'as it were, by a spell'. A pale light was called for from the King's Theatre technicians to 'deepen [the music's] sombre and unearthly aspect'. The moon, hovering against the backdrop, appeared as a thinly disguised metaphor; it symbolised the position of the protagonist, the half-lit environment mirroring Velluti's sense of abstraction. Music played its part too. Diegetic gestures abounded: the off-stage harp, the musical form of the *romanza*, the return to an imagined, pre-existing performance. It was as if Tebaldo's aria had been cut off from the main

<sup>64</sup> That Velluti featured in Garcia's textbook of vocal technique at all was interesting, given how wedded the compiler was to the new pathology of song. So possessed was the Spaniard by the desire to see vocal physiology in action, that he worked out a way to become the first singer in history to observe his own larynx. He invented the double-mirror laryngoscope in 1855.



Plate 5. 'Caro suono lusinghier' with Velluti embellishments. Manuel Garcia,  
 École de Garcia: Traité complet de l'art du chant, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2 vols (Paris and London, 1847-51), II, 100-3

Air de Teobaldo  
 et Isolina  
 de MORLACCHI.

FLAUTO.

ARCA.

désespéré.  
 forte.

surprise  
 piano.  
 Timbre couvert

ce n to

Mo-ric ciel qual con - cento

dimin. et ritard<sup>o</sup>

9

sous en dehors.

doux.

lent.

Timbre ouvert.  
 ces notes lentes et égales.

inspiré.  
 sur cadence de jure.

Lo conosco

lo sento nel mio co - re

è la mano d'l so li - na

inspiré.  
 sur cadence de jure.

Il faut ici deux timbres. Le timbre clair pour le Si et le timbre couvert pour le Fa. Les passages de Si à Fa sont courts et délicats.

16

sous couverts.  
 cresc.

dimin.

Ce passage doit être exécuté par des mouvements souples du gosier.

ce sont quatre notes égales et lentes, mais sans portée de voix.

e il suo - no il suo - no del - l'a - mor

colla parte.

23

Timbre éclatant et clair.

sous d'Harmonica.

forte. piano.

le pharynx s'essorre,  
 les sons moelleux.

ah! che la prima vol - ta che l'in - ten - si e che di lei m'ac - ce - si e ra un in can - to

Dopo la parola accesi.

ritard<sup>o</sup>

28

expiration légère. *Timbre ouvert.*  
 h'ima al\_lor-e ra fe - li - ce  
 note et syllabe légères  
 or tris-tae so  
 appoggiature rapide sans support de voix.  
 pianiss?  
 la  
 accompagnement de surprise.  
 pharynx resserré.  
 inspiration.  
 for-se a me for-se a me pe\_n-sa  
 notes liées ensemble et rapidement concourant.  
 appui du chant.

34

voix mélancolique.  
 étendez la voix sur toutes les notes.  
 éclat: *p* *rall.*  
 e il su - o do lor con - so - la  
 physionomie riante.  
 élan de l'ame.  
 Timbre clair. éclat: *p*  
 ca - ro suo - no lu - sin  
 pharynx resserré.  
*And.<sup>te</sup> mosso.* *ritard!*

41

ghier dolce o gnor mi scen - - de al cor  
 do mordant moult.  
 rinf?  
 Sens imitant l'écho.  
 smorzando.  
 dol - ce o - gnor mi - scen - - de al cor tu ri.  
 rinf?  
 de al cor tu ri  
 inspiration après la port de voir.  
*colla parte.*

48

cresc: *f* *p* écho  
 ehia mi'al mi o peto\_sier i pia cer d'un cas - - to a - mor quel bel di che ci ra -  
 pharynx resserré.  
 dolce.  
 cresc:  
 cer - d'un cas - - to a - mor  
*p f p f*

53

Bouche riante.  
Pharynx resserré.  
Mouvements légers  
du larynx.

Arpège porté.

*Enfin une expiration  
briève de la D*

Expiration  
cylinder

population  
ranging

10

Musical score for "L'Espresso" by Giuseppe Verdi. The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. It features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "pi de sua pura vo - - lut - ta h! Do - ve an - do h! Do - ve an - do do - h! vean". The piano part includes markings: "sempre", "secondando", and "il canto."

58

leaves. fort.  
6 note

espirito. piano.  
lentes.

expiration.

Expiration

*Expiration.*

call<sup>u</sup>

do do ve ando mio ben quel di h! a - h! mai più h! a - h! mai più a - - h. mai più no no mai più ri - tor - ne -

sempre secondando il canto

colla parte.

63

twitter la son par  
une exclamation

pharynx resserré  
son imitant l'écho.

adagio

inflexions

respirer le sonnet  
sans respirer

*Spicer.*

-ra mai più mai più a - h! mai più ri - tor - ne - ra a - - - h! mai più no non mai  
 a tempo.

69

forte.

più ri - tor - ne - ra.

narrative: a staged song, sub-operatic, submerged beneath the opera. 'While this scene is displayed, which seems to paint the silence of night even to the eye', Ebers wrote, 'the full orchestral accompaniment is hushed – the flute and the harp alone are heard to prelude the mournful air that breaks from the lips of the melancholy warrior'.<sup>65</sup> The stillness of the scene presented an inactive, twilight world to the audience, where nothing (new) was happening. Events had been suspended on the surface, as if to simulate the delirium of a dream.

Musically, the most striking feature of Tebaldo's song is its harmonic stasis. The romance is written in two stanzas, the first beginning at bar 9, the second at bar 39. Overall, the harmony moves within a spectacularly narrow orbit; background interest is subordinated to foreground melody and ornament. Apart from the briefest dominant arrivals at bars 27 and 54, there is hardly any musical progression. Mirrored phrases (like those at bars 19–20 and 21–22), fragmented appearances of the theme (bars 31–35 in the flute and bars 59–63) and repeated cadential echoes in the tonic (bars 18–23; bars 36–39; bars 48–51 and bars 64–70) extend the form and preserve the mood of suspense. The stiltedness of the form is particularly remarkable in the first stanza (bars 9 to 38), with its interrupting pause marks and unmetred sections of vocal display (bars 18 and 25).<sup>66</sup> The propulsion of an 'andante mosso' will only come at bar 39 with the words 'Caro suono lusinghier'. Yet for all its harmonic poverty, the aria boasts a wealth of rhythmic interest. Velluti's embellishments showcase a vocal range of nearly two and a half octaves, from the singer's low E flat ossia (bar 47) to high A flat in bar 50.

For the first nine bars, the absent Isolina plays a simple dominant seventh sweep on her harp. We can imagine her audience holding its breath in anticipation of the melody. But instead of hearing a singing voice as expected in bar 9, the listener

<sup>65</sup> 'The moonlight scene in the last act is so excellent, not only in itself, but in the opportunities it afforded of theatrical display, that those who have witnessed it must yet retain a lively impression of its power and beauty. In this scene, the prominent object is a castle illuminated by the rays of the moon.... Such had been the skill of the painter, that a pale gleaming light seemed to pervade every part of the stage.... If ever the attention of an audience was enchained, enthralled, bound, as it were, by a spell, it was when Velluti sang the *Notte tremenda*. The stillness of the scene was communicated to the house; and not a word was spoken, not a breath heard: – was this wonderful? When not to the eye and ear only, but to the heart and soul'; see Ebers, *Seven Years of the King's Theatre*, 292–3.

<sup>66</sup> A comparison of the early printed editions of Meyerbeer's *Il crociato* with the manuscript preserved in the archives of La Fenice reveals similar findings in Velluti's part: in the manuscript, unadorned fermatas and a simple melodic framework ripe for embellishment; see Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Il Crociato in Egitto: Melodramma Erioco* (1824), ed. Philip Gossett (New York, 1979). Unmetered sections and arbitri (options) also litter the castrato's part in *Aureliano in Palmira*; see Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 141.

encounters a *parlando* section in which the tune is played by a flute. Velluti merely apostrophises beneath and around the melody 'sung' instrumentally – this lasts a full thirty bars. We are in Tebaldo's mind; and the flute, we learn, is a surrogate for the lost voice of Isolina. Her imagined song begins with three phrases ending on dominant fermatas, reinforcing the tonal hovering. Only the forte cadence brings resolution (upbeat to bar 16), although the cadential echo sung by Velluti nullifies its grounding effect, with an asymmetric fifth phrase shorn of accompaniment and metre (bar 18).<sup>67</sup>

In this tentative first stanza, the castrato has been subtracted from the scene; dramatically, he is trying to make sense of a song heard in his head. It is as if the 'real world' of Isolina's aria is off-stage, historical and absent; the castrato reduced to commenting on a memory, to observing an intrusion from the past. The stage is set on 'the other side' of the musical experience: in the dark space of listening rather than in the light of performance. Here, Tebaldo joins his audience in a neutral zone; the actor apparently reduced to directing his and their experience of the action. As the flute plays the opening melody, Velluti interprets it as 'the sound of love' (*il suono d'amore*); his identification of this voice in bar 18 registered in melismas 'performed by supple movements of the throat'. He makes this identification, in other words, in an alienated or estranged style of vocalisation. Similarly, when the castrato first recognises the love-object – the sound of the flute – he utters 'lo conosco' (I know it) in 'tones from the outside', in a covered timbre (bar 11). The implication is that he is external to experience – that his voice is partially missing, that he is no longer fully representable. Unable to speak or sing of love directly, he must comment from a distance, from the vantage point of the still, enigmatic world of his subconscious.

As if to reinforce the sense of the onstage subject being spirited away, Tebaldo's cavatina makes its appearance in the form of a 'shadow-aria'. From the first statement of the melody, Velluti's voice is cut away and compensated for by the missing Isolina, this 'real' diegetic sound, this sound of fullness and earthy femininity. He has been partially mis- or displaced. There is a real sense in these opening lines that listening to this chimera is like listening to a trace, a scar or

<sup>67</sup> Significantly, this phrase does not recur in the second stanza. Moreover, in the early printed editions a much simpler vocal line retains the harp accompaniment at this point; see Francesco Morlacchi and Gaetano Rossi, *Tebaldo e Isolina: A facsimile Edition of the Printed Piano-Vocal Score (ca. 1825)*, ed. Philip Gossett, Garland Opera Series (New York, 1989), 234.



memory, something that has passed. When Velluti finally answers the flute with 'Caro suono lusinghier', when he finally arrives at his beginning, he has been pre-empted; an excuse has been made for him. The music having reached the second stanza – bar 39 – he merely repeats a pre-existing melody. When the flute echoes his 'Caro suono' with a melodic summary of the two phrases that have come before, the line has been divided or split into octaves (bar 42). Velluti's response is to sing 'dolce oignor mi scendi al cor' in 'tones imitating an echo' and *smorzando* (bar 46). Tebaldo's vocal statement here is a sad reflection of what it means to be 'touched sweetly by love'. Melodically, moreover, he is in tatters; he has entered the aria only on the occasion of its embellished repeat – an acoustic mutilation has occurred. The castrato's failing subjectivity has been scripted into the score such that only a shredded commentary, an echo, of Isolina's original remains.

In the 1820s 'Caro suono lusinghier' owed much of its popularity to the way in which Morlacchi performed the onstage subject's castration. Velluti's lack of agency is also dramatised in such *bizzareries* as the flute-voice clashes (F natural-F sharp/F sharp-G natural) from the end of bar 28, the hemidemisemiquaver echo in bar 48 and the offbeat forte stresses in bar 52. All these reinforce his sense of stylisation. As we have seen, Tebaldo's removal from the musical scene is striking. After all, the theme of the romance itself was 'loss' or 'absence'; a fact that no doubt excused the thinness of the castrated sound as expressive rather than pathetic. The refrain 'never to return', 'non mai più ritornerà' in the concluding bars must have seemed particularly poignant to audiences in the late 1820s. We can imagine listeners drawn to Morlacchi's dramatisation of the castrato staged in the twilight of his career; attracted as much as repulsed by the smooth wailing of his voice. All in all, 'Caro suono lusinghier' appeared as a way of integrating the castrato's old-fashioned micro-managed aesthetic into an emerging expressive framework, where expiry and expiration (literally, if you take Velluti's audible expirations into account) were drawn on as a dramatic resource.<sup>68</sup> The castrato was heard as if in a dream; he was experienced in the same 'virtual' way in which Mendelssohn experienced him on the night of 15 May 1829.

Velluti's style of performing Tebaldo, as exemplified in Garcia's tutor, hearkened back to a bygone era, an era before the individuality of the singer was expressed timbrally or bodily. Here was a time in which individuality was expressed

<sup>68</sup> For scored inhalations and exhalations, see bars 28, 33, 55, 57, 59, 60 and 61.

via spontaneous selections from the vocal armoury: a learned technical palette with preparations, formulae and other 'parts of speech'. Minute gradations of smorzature, rinforzi, gruppetti, mordenti, trilli, appoggiature, mezzotinte, sfumature were called forth to etch as finely as possible the precise emotion sought. A myriad of chiaroscuro and ombreggiamento effects added to all the innumerable modifications in tone quality. Never once was the purity of the vowel disturbed, contrary to the fashion when Garcia published his score. Here was music to elevate, educate and ennoble; it was not to touch. As Rossini once wrote, these were sounds – the castrato was in his mind here – 'heard within the soul'.<sup>69</sup>

In many ways, the outlandishness of the performance markings and ornamental finery is disturbing. From the point of view of modern practice, it is debateable whether an historically-informed restitution of Velluti's style is musically useful or desirable – not to speak of ethical. (Or are we to argue that castration was a good thing?) One of the assumptions of 'authentic practice', after all, is that 'correct' performance makes for a pleasant, wholesome encounter. In the case of Velluti, the stench of antiquity that hangs over his manner is positively disengaging; this music is not ours.<sup>70</sup>

For the Romantics, as we have seen, such a disembodied accretion of signs was equally affected, even sickening. All these inflections, tintings and shadings added up to little more than endless and empty whimpering. More disconcerting for the modern ear was all that soft moaning, those snivelling half-breaths, the fussy silences, the supple movements in the throat, all the audible exhalations, the thrilling 'jerky inhalations' of air, the echo effects, glottal sounds, the sustained consonants, sobs of passion, snuffed finishes, constant diminuendi, mooching swells, the lack of brio – all that refined whining, sighing and panting. This school's miniaturist aesthetic had no breadth of vision. It felt post-coital in the way it evaded cultural work and limped pusillanimously from one note to the next. This canto di maniera – this mannered style – possessed very little organic power, conviction or direction. There was hardly anything there – as though the thoracic cavity, the vocal carriage,

<sup>69</sup> In a letter to Luigi Crisostomo Ferucci of 23 March 1866, Rossini wrote: 'Those mutilated boys, who could follow no other career but that of singing, were the founders of the 'cantar che nell'anima si sente', and the horrid decadence of Italian bel canto originated with their suppression'; see Herbert Weinstock, Rossini: A biography (London, 1968), 338.

<sup>70</sup> Just as some parts of history do not need to be dredged up, so some musics do not need 'authentic' revival. My view is that to want to sound like a castrato in the modern era, to pretend to sing like one, is ethically problematic, and should be thought of as such.

had been hollowed out. Everything happened externally, in the always-already of a boyish throat. If sound issued from the castrato's languorous body at all, far from being expressed, it seemed to be emitted accidentally. It was as though the voice was secreting or discharging passively. The music had nothing to do with expression – natural self-expression – in the modern sense.

On one level, Velluti was animal: 'a reptile to be loathed', as the Examiner suggested, with a voice like a 'peacock's scream'; on another, he was machine. The orientalism and artificiality of his acting drew repeated comment, the Atlas being troubled by the 'incessant jerk of the head, like a mandarin in a china-shop'.<sup>71</sup> The London Magazine, as if to agree, linked his style to singing machines and steam engines:

If we could imagine an automaton as skilled in singing, as Roger Bacon's fabled clock-work head was in speaking, we can fancy that the effect would be similar; for the precision with which Velluti executes the most difficult passages, can only be compared with that of a piece of machinery, and the likeness would hold good also in respect of an occasional want of modulation in his highest tones, and a certain grating sharpness of finish. Some pieces of music he performs exactly as a steam-engine would perform them, if a steam-engine could be made to sing, taking each note with unerring accuracy, and taking each by a separate impulse, instead of floating on the gamut as less perfect singers commonly do.<sup>72</sup>

The end of the passage is interesting. When Velluti did receive praise, it was usually because he avoided 'connecting the sound with another by whooping, hectic slides', as the New Monthly Magazine put it in 1826. The technique of vocalisation referred to here is unfamiliar to the modern ear, although it is plain that such sliding across notes was expected of particularly castrati. The practice of connecting tones microtonally, though 'asiatic' by today's standards, was fresh enough in the memory to be described in Garcia's tutor of 1847. The portamento di voce or the related agilità di portamento, Garcia suggested, was indicated by what we would today interpret as a legato slur, as in bar 54, 48 or 36 of Morlacchi's aria for Velluti. Both Bacilly (1669) and Tosi (1723) describe a similar portamento or port de voix, as a style of 'sliding' or 'dragging' one note into another. Garcia was clear that the serpentine line implied by this pre-nineteenth-century indication 'revolts a man of taste'.<sup>73</sup> This winding,

<sup>71</sup> The Atlas (18 June 186), 74.

<sup>72</sup> The London Magazine (August 1825), 518.

<sup>73</sup> Garcia, École de Garcia: Traité complet de l'art du chant, 55.

phonetic genus, while remote by the standards of Velluti and 1847, was nevertheless lodged in the vocabulary of mid-nineteenth-century song. Stendhal's description of Velluti's voice as a 'terra incognita' was not idle. The castrati were always best made sense of in terms of an ethnography of song.<sup>74</sup>

Tebaldo e Isolina failed miserably when Velluti presented it in London in 1826. The New Monthly Magazine found it tiresome and complained at 'the abundance of subject in the minor mode', 'dissonant harmonies', 'diminished sevenths with inversions without end' and 'chromatic modulations of the deepest die':

The ear soon grows tired of a continued succession of larmoyantes melodies, and lugubrious harmonies ... such lympomania is perhaps more endemial here than anywhere else, as may be inferred ... from the numerous gloomy subjects daily poetised upon among us.... Patrons of the woeful, whose bliss are groans and tears, have a delightful treat prepared for them in Morlacchi's music of 'Tebaldo e Isolina', especially when moaned out in the lugubrious and impure intonation of Signor Velluti.<sup>75</sup>

A pall of decay and gloom seemed to hang over Morlacchi's music when the castrato discharged it via his 'sickly' body. The Examiner called it 'a thing of shreds and patches' and 'a mere cobweb in composition'. 'All is cut and frittered away', the reviewer argued, 'in a constant succession of unmeaning flourishes'.<sup>76</sup> The sound seeped like vapour from the singer's tall, gothic form. Many commentators remarked at how much Tebaldo reminded them of a certain Claude Ambroise Seurat, who was being exhibited as a freak at the Chinese Saloon. This emaciated Frenchman – the so-called l'anatomie vivante, 'living skeleton' or le cupidon français of 94 Pall Mall – 'lived off' Velluti's continued celebrity, or so most of the public understood. 'The gaunt frame and awkward gait of Velluti', the Athenaeum

<sup>74</sup> For more on this, see John Rosselli, 'Song into Theatre: the Beginnings of Opera', John Potter, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Singing (Cambridge, 2000), 83–95, 88.

<sup>75</sup> The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal (1 April 1826), 150. The Harmonicon argued that Morlacchi's opera existed only to 'gratify the vanity of the musico'. The critic defended the composer on the basis that he had adapted his original to suit a weak summer company. The opera, apparently, was 'surpassed in poverty of design and feebleness of execution by drivelling compositions of Nicolini, Pacini, Pavesi, Mercadente, and id genus omne. So ignorant, indeed, does the composer seem of the real object of music, that he has thought only of the words and neglected the ideas. Thus the heroine, when lamenting her lost felicity, launches into an air of tumultuous gaiety'; see The Harmonicon 3 (1826), 86.

<sup>76</sup> The Examiner 943 (5 March 1826), 148

remarked of the castrato's Tebaldo, 'looked like an embroidered skeleton with a spangled death's hand, aping the hero and the lover'.<sup>77</sup>

In the end, 'the painted sepulchre', as the Times labelled him, concealed a deception fundamental to everything – DEATH. Bizarrely, though he was at least forty-four in 1825, the London Magazine introduced him as being 'no more than twenty-four years of age'.<sup>78</sup> Without a history, he was apparently both old and young, as though cut off from the present.<sup>79</sup> His lack of centre emptied him of passion, made him a relic or corpse with the opera house his tomb. 'Were I to scour your body with this blade, would I find there one feeling to stifle, one vengeance to satisfy?' Sarrasine asks the eunuch in Balzac's story. 'You are nothing', he rages: 'If you were a man or a woman, I would kill you'.<sup>80</sup> The world of the castrati, Balzac wanted to say, was a world of murder, wailing and the gnashing of teeth.

Velluti arrived for his final season in London on 11 April 1829. He was no longer welcome at the opera. Instead, he earned his living teaching the wives and daughters of the haute ton at his Singing Academy on Regent Street (the 'School of Cant' as it was affectionately known). Occasionally he would venture into public to perform, although, by the end of the season, he was reduced to singing English concert airs, such as Thomas Welsh's 'Ah! Can I think of days gone by'.<sup>81</sup> A plan he brokered (which garnered the support of the Duke of Wellington and the ballet-master D'Egville) to turn the Argyll Rooms into a venue to rival the King's Theatre came to nothing in 1830, when the concern burnt to the ground.<sup>82</sup> Broken and

<sup>77</sup> The Athenaeum 943 (5 March 1826), 148. Seurat appeared at the behest of the radical attorney, Mr Pearson, who exhibited him from late 1825 to 1826 at the height of Velluti-mania. 'No Englishman can look upon the French Apollo', one commentator remarked, 'without thanking his stars he is an Englishman'; European Magazine (September 1825), 77. A Mr Boyle contributed a full anatomical analysis of Seurat in The Medical and Physical Journal for Sep/Oct; see extracts in The Courier 10,568 (3 October 1825), 4d. Another article described him as 'a man in the last stage of some chronic disease', 28 years of age, and five foot seven. 'Sexual passion exists', the writer noted, 'but has never been indulged; see The London Medical Repository and Review 1 (June–December 1825), 379–80.

<sup>78</sup> The London Magazine (June 1825), 269.

<sup>79</sup> By emphasising his nothingness, Velluti recalled earlier castrati who might, for example, actively encourage the myth that they had been born from an egg. Interestingly, the castrato's 'unmetered' existence expressed itself musically. Velluti's part in Aureliano, for example, is striking for the way it features additions sung 'out of time' – passages strewn with unmetered grace notes, arbitri sections, triplet/duplet interplay etc.

<sup>80</sup> Balzac, 'Sarrasine', 252.

<sup>81</sup> See Morning Herald (10 June 1829), 3f. Less than a week later, when Velluti repeated Welsh's composition, one journalist wrote that 'though he displayed great vocal powers and execution, they were not such as are quite suitable to an English air, nor are the tones of his voice of that kind which are likely to please the lovers of genuine English music'; Morning Herald (16 June 1829), 3e.

<sup>82</sup> Ballet-divertissements, episodic scenes from operas, tableaux-vivants, 'conversations', promenades and balls were to be run under a committee of 'lady patronesses'; see the plan in The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 194.



dispirited, the castrato returned to Italy at the end of 1829 where he patched together appearances in Tebaldo e Isolina (Lugo di Romagna, 1830), Il crociato in Egitto (Brescia, 1830 and Florence, 1833), Aureliano in Palmira (Brescia, 1831), Nicolini's Il conte di Lenosse (Venice, 1831) and, bizarrely, an Italianised La muta di Portici (Venice, 1831). For all intents and purposes, however, the writing had been on the wall during those last days in London. At the end of the season, he retired to a quiet villa on the banks of the Brenta near Venice.<sup>83</sup> There, as if to make peace with the natural laws that had put paid to his career, he spent his final thirty years as a gentleman farmer, communing with the fields and flowers.

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<sup>83</sup> He had acquired the villa in 1822; see Ermanno Illuminati, Giovan Battista Velluti: cantante lirico (1780–1860) (Corridonia, 1985), 20.

## 'An Act of Profanation': Beethoven-Bochsa's *Symphonie pastorale*

### Unlawful histories, or Beethoven in tights

It has always seemed surprising that George Grove added a list of dramatic performances to the end of his 1896 chapter on Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps he sensed that these curious nineteenth-century dramas were somehow significant. The author's appendix traced the earliest example of such symphonic stagings to a reworking of the Sixth as a ballet-pantomime performed on 22 June 1829 at the King's Theatre, London. This first *Pastoral* with actions, like its later companions, disappeared completely from the historical map after Grove; the performance has been forgotten for more than a century. But now that interest in reception and cultural studies has gathered and a new 'visuality' has seeped into musicological writing – witness Annette Richards' recent book on 'the musical picturesque' or Thomas Grey's 1997 article on Mendelssohn's orchestral visualisations<sup>2</sup> – it seems that the 1829 staging organised by Robert Nicolas Charles Bochsa is once more materialising out of the invisible past once more. One or two recent writers, while they may still treat the historical moment with a smile, call it 'bizarre', or dismiss it as a relic from the dark ages of English music-making, at least acknowledge its existence.<sup>3</sup> As the first truly seen *Pastoral* steadily takes shape in the cultural eye again, questions are being raised. What does this danced Beethoven symphony mean? What does it represent historically? And why is it reappearing in the modern imagination?

<sup>1</sup> George Grove, *Beethoven and his Nine Symphonies* (London, 1896), 226.

<sup>2</sup> See Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and Musical Picturesque* (Cambridge, 2001) and Thomas Grey, 'Tableaux Vivants: Landscape, History Painting, and the Visual Imagination in Mendelssohn's Orchestral Music', *19th-Century Music* 21/1 (1997), 38–76.

<sup>3</sup> See for example David Wyn Jones, *Beethoven: Pastoral Symphony* (Cambridge, 1995), 84. Richard Will took the first serious glance at the staging; see Richard Will, 'Time, Morality, and Humanity in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony', *The Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 (1997), 271–329.

The recasting of a German symphony by a group of mainly French men and women at the Italian Opera in London has been regarded at best as an item of vague antiquarian interest, at worst as an aberration. The involvement of Bochsa has not helped. The man who spawned the idea of dancing to Beethoven has occupied just as illegitimate a position in history as his most infamous creation. Former child prodigy, former first composer to Napoleon, former Commandant of Music to the King's Guard (*Les Mousquetaires noirs*) under Louis XVIII, inaugural general secretary and 'founding father' of the Royal Academy of Music in London,<sup>4</sup> former proprietor and director of the sacred Lenten Oratorio Series at the Winter Theatres in London, appointed director of the King's Theatre in 1826 on the personal recommendation of George IV, soon to be director of San Carlo Theatre in Naples and Associate to the Holy Chapter of the Order of Santa Cecilia in Rome, Bochsa was also an escaped felon, condemned falsifier, forger, larcenist, thief, philanderer, bigamist and, worst of all, harp virtuoso!

History records the defining moment of Bochsa's career as 19 February 1818, when a judge at the Cour d'Assises in Paris passed judgement at a trial involving eight counts of forging bonds or promissory notes to the value of 760,000 francs. The Duke of Wellington, the Salle Feydeau (the Opéra-Comique), and the composers Méhul, Boieldieu, Berton and Isouard were among the claimants. Having escaped to London five months prior to the hearing, the accused was not around to hear the verdict. Bochsa was tried *in absente reo*, found guilty on all charges, sentenced to twelve years of forced labour, branding with the letters 'T. F.' (Travaux Forces) on the forehead, a fine of 4,000 francs, and (according to a mysterious contributor in the *Harmonicon* who identified himself as 'The Detector') the pillory. He never returned to France to serve these sentences.<sup>5</sup>

While a full account of Bochsa's colourful life falls outside the scope of this study, a glance at his outlandish criminality is important to understanding the tarred reputation of his most notorious musical offence. Contrasted via this 'Dramatic

<sup>4</sup> '[Bochsa] ... persuaded an amiable nobleman', William Ayrton wrote in a letter now in The British Library, 'that an academy of music after the French model would add to our national glory, and that he was the fittest man in the world to manage an establishment for the education of both sexes'; see The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 60,370/1,065e.

<sup>5</sup> A fire in the repository of civil documents at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris in 1871 destroyed all official evidence of Bochsa's trial (their duplicates at the Palais de Justice do not survive either), but newspaper notices in *Le Moniteur universel* of 19 February 1818 (reprinted in the *Gazette de Paris* and the *Journal de Paris*) confirm its occurrence; see Patricia John, *Bochsa and the Biographical Dictionaries of Music and Musicians* (Houston, 1990), 22. For an account of Bochsa's life in London, see Appendix 1.

Concert' with the rapidly emerging notion of Beethoven's moral goodness, the forger's turpitude has obscured clear views of the historical moment. On the wrong side of history, Bochsa's prolific borrowing and performance-orientated style of composition were just beginning to pale beside the standard nineteenth-century representation of Beethoven as the transhistorical Author-God. As a harp-player, moreover, Bochsa had chosen an instrument which, because its mechanism was physical, seen, and never hidden in the manner of a klavier, was increasingly becoming marginalised. 'There is something repulsive in a gigantic sort of personage like Mr Bochsa playing so feminine an instrument as the harp', William Parke noticed as early as 1830, 'whose strings, in my opinion should only be made to vibrate by the delicate fingers of the ladies'.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Bochsa was involved in ballet-pantomime, another feminised and peripheral musical form: forgotten in an environment where opera, which struggled to keep pace with dance's popularity in late 1820s London, now enjoys an abundance of critical attention.

Bochsa's proclivity to 'see' instrumental music, and to have it realized accordingly, may have been an extreme symptom of a general trend, but it was still representative of a normal early nineteenth-century desire to secure the abstractions of the concert hall in a visual or gestural way. Indeed, far from being historically inexplicable, his scenographic depiction of the Pastoral pointed to a broadly felt tendency to hear music in terms of dance-like pictures and movement. That such imaginings found opposition throughout the nineteenth century – judged unlawful by the narrowing views of increasingly score-bound critics – is neatly expressed in both the historical-biographical fate of the harpist and the negative reception of his *Symphonie pastorale* by at least two reviewers in the London press.<sup>7</sup> Bochsa was, in other words, an exaggerated type of normal early nineteenth-century musician who fell victim – in a spectacular way – to rapidly developing notions of the authority of the Original, the narrowing rules of the text-bound work, and the laws of intellectual property.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> William T. Parke, *Musical Memoirs; Comprising an Account of the General State of Music in England* (London, 1830), II, 82.

<sup>7</sup> See reviews in *The Times* (24 June 1829), repeated in *Evening Mail* (24 June 1829), and in *The Court Journal* 1/9 (1829). These accounts need to be balanced against the more complimentary (and sometimes glowing) assessments of reporters writing for other periodicals.

<sup>8</sup> A cultural privileging of the ineffable over the visual qualities of music accelerated the general slide towards amnesia, away from such extremes as this pantomimic intrusion into Beethoven's world. For more on the ambivalence towards the visual in music, and a discussion of Liszt and virtuosity, see Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley, 2002) 68–99.

Leapfrogging the denunciations and inattentions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this chapter will explore the sense in which Beethoven-Bochsa's *Symphonie pastorale* was fully expressive of its context.<sup>9</sup> Adding its voice to recent studies which identify cross-arts relationships in early nineteenth-century art (Martin Meisel's look at those between drama, painting and fiction, or Marian Smith's recent survey of ballet-opera reciprocities),<sup>10</sup> it hopes to recover an important exchange occurring between ballet-pantomime and concert music around 1829. Evidence shows that, despite widespread critical opposition, ballet and instrumental music, far from drifting apart, actually came together at the time. Defying resistance in the press, the material and visual elements of dance and the aural abstractions of 'pure' music began to show envy for one other. The second half of the chapter will show how ballet moved away from the codified gestures and semantically coded security of its past (*ballet d'action*), and shifted into an abstract and elusive style – a fantasy mode I will call 'music-play'. Meanwhile concerts, as a counterpoint to the increasingly symphonic abstractions of the stage, 'danced' in ever more precise pictorial and corporeal movements on the platform: an equally vivid shift I survey in the first half. Taken seriously, Bochsa's performance represents the culmination of these reciprocal trends, as ballet and concert brought a momentarily felt expressive mutuality into focus. The final offering on the bill for 22 June – this artistic coming-together – will be recuperated briefly at the end of the article: but only, in the words of the *Athenaeum* reviewer of 1829, as 'a tolerable dessert to a sufficient repast'.<sup>11</sup>

### Choreographing concerts: towards seeing ears and listening eyes

In the late 1820s, trends in the concert hall were directed by a lingering (and often deepening) eighteenth-century anxiety over the 'competence' of the most abstract or indistinct of modern representational forms: instrumental music. This unease was reflected in the ever-increasing popularity of tone-paintings; the admixture of vocal music and poetic interpolations amid instrumental items; the increasing detail of handbills and programmes; the frequent repetition of familiar music (so that it began

<sup>9</sup> Contrary to the norm, Sir George MacFarren, professor at Cambridge University and principal of the Royal Academy of Music, included the following in a public lecture: 'at one of his concerts [Bochsa] gave Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, with illustrative action, and certainly this ingenious device created great interest; many persons assuming that the stage accessories threw light on the purpose of the composition'; see George A. MacFarren, *Addresses and Lectures* (London, 1888), 152.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1983); Marian Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle* (Princeton, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> *The Athenaeum* 87 (24 June 1829), 396.



to cohere into a canon); a tendency to add stage effects to orchestral music; a growing fascination with the physical movements of the players or 'acting instruments'; and, crucially in light of the influence of ballet, the emerging pantomimic figure of the orchestral conductor. Also reflecting the constant demand for variety, these developments supplied visual referents for the viewer-listener to engage with, fortified the experience of instrumental music, relieved its perceived imprecision, and inflected concert culture with some of the visual shadings of ballet-pantomime.

The Pastoral was a prime mover in these developments, single-handedly both mediating the whole experience of the emerging canon of classical music from Handel onwards and directing musical creativity into the future. Picturesque tendencies in composition from the late 1820s accompanied the popularity of the Sixth and the visual trends in performance, as Berlioz's Symphonie fantastique (1830), Spohr's Fourth Symphony ('Die Weihe der Töne', 1832), Mendelssohn's Fifth Symphony ('The Reformation', 1830), Moscheles' 'Fantastique' Sixth Piano Concerto (1833) and Schumann's First Symphony ('Spring', 1841) attest. All these compositions doffed their hats to some aspect of the Sixth, a work that fleshed out the emerging idea of the timeless genius of its composer by reconciling it with the precise terms of a programme. Intrinsically associated with the quasi-pastoral figurations of early ballet-pantomime, moreover, this symphony was particularly amenable to the growing trend to 'see' concerts in dance-like ways. Its burgeoning fame fully paralleled the emergence of the romantic and balletic fantasy of a music taken material shape.

Before 1830, English fervour for the scenographer in Beethoven was as immense as it was unprecedented. Advertisements in local newspapers confirm that the Pastoral was publicly performed in London by 27 May 1811, less than two and a half years after its premiere in Vienna.<sup>12</sup> Although there were probably earlier

<sup>12</sup> The earliest documented London performance occurred at a concert for the benefit of the singer Mrs Vaughan (formerly Tennant) at the New Rooms in Hanover Square under the patronage of the Dukes of Cambridge, Sussex and Cumberland (Weichsel 'led' and Crotch 'presided' at the organ and piano). It is likely – based on the evidence of a short report in the Harmonicon of 1832 – that this performance was not the first rendition of op. 68 in London. In the 1960s, Nicholas Temperley linked the premiere to an organisation founded by city merchants, The Harmonic Society, which performed instrumental music at the London Tavern from about 1806–9; see Nicholas Temperley, 'Beethoven in London Concert Life, 1800–1850', The Music Review 21 (1960), 207–14, particularly 209. Advertisements for Mrs Vaughan's benefit append 'never publicly performed in this country' to the Pastoral Symphony; see The Morning Chronicle (27 May 1811). Temperley is probably accurate in his assumption, despite Vaughan's claim, that this was not the first rendition. Oboist Johann Griesbach's benefit sixteen days after Mrs Vaughan's (12 June 1811) billed a performance of 'the celebrated Pastoral Symphony'. The idea that the symphony was 'celebrated' after only sixteen days and a solitary performance seems

renditions, this date is extraordinary in light of the comparatively belated Paris début, in March 1829 at the Société des Concerts.<sup>13</sup> It is also remarkable relative to the first official London appearance of the Fifth Symphony (premiered alongside the Sixth in Vienna) on 15 April 1816 by the orchestra of the three-year-old Philharmonic Society. Before 1830, the Pastoral had amassed at least twenty-two confirmed performances in London; the Fifth, by contrast, managed fifteen. Along with the post-Waterloo flurry of Wellingtons Sieg performances, it was the dance-like figurations of the Pastoral that grounded Beethoven's emerging pre-eminence.

London was the centre for this process. In his 1831 article for the Foreign Quarterly Review, critic Edward Holmes made clear that 'it was in this nebulous atmosphere of England, that [Beethoven's excellence was] first acknowledged'.<sup>14</sup> Apart from Holmes, at least three sources suggest that this excellence was based on an insatiable English enthusiasm for the Sixth. The first, found in the preface of an 1827 article in the Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review, recorded the correspondent's conversation with the composer:

[I] ventured an observation to [Beethoven], that the Pastoral Symphony seemed to be most beloved by a British audience, speaking as an eye-witness, and judging by the effect its performance never failed to produce, especially on the fair part of the audience, causing so many bright eyes of those fair listeners to sparkle with delight, and how its charm seemed to transport their souls to the rural sports of shepherd and shepherdesses in the Arcadian fields.<sup>15</sup>

Amongst the later additions to his Beethoven biography (1840), Schindler suggested something similar: 'As for the Pastoral, it is noteworthy that this symphony aroused less offence in England than anywhere else, and after a few performances it was fully appreciated'.<sup>16</sup> A third passage in George Hogarth's 1838 general history of music also indicated huge esteem:

The Sinfonia Pastorale is probably the finest piece of music in existence. Every movement of this charming work is a scene, and

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unlikely. Earlier London performances of the work must have occurred, even though no programmes or newspaper advertisements survive; see The Morning Chronicle (12 June 1811).

<sup>13</sup> For the Sixth's premiere in France, see Katharine Ellis, Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France (Cambridge, 1995), 43.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Holmes, 'Ludwig van Beethoven', in Foreign Quarterly Review 8 (1831), 439–61, 449.

<sup>15</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 9 (1827), 269.

<sup>16</sup> Anton Felix Schindler, Beethoven as I Knew Him, ed. Donald W. MacArdle, trans. Constance S. Jolly (London, 1966), 504. London, generally, was enthusiastic about Beethoven's music, although the composer received relatively little benefit from his success there. Between 1799 and 1827, 140 works attributed to Beethoven were published, with few omissions, to op. 97; see Percy M. Young, Beethoven: A Victorian Tribute (Based on the Papers of Sir George Smart) (London, 1976), 25.

every scene is full of the most beautiful images of rural nature and rural life. We feel the freshness of the breeze, the waving of the woods, the cheerful notes of the birds, and cries of animals ... every image [is set] before the mind with a distinctiveness which neither poetry or painting could surpass, and with a beauty which neither of them could equal.<sup>17</sup>

By 1830, the distinct eye-centredness of the Pastoral firmly established it as the most popular instrumental piece, if not in Europe, then certainly in England. Its growing reputation related to a new mode of listening that emerged in its favour around the late 1820s. More and more, it offered the mould, not only for the emerging canon of composers past and present, but for the entire oeuvre of Beethoven himself.

The Sixth's programme overwhelmed English musical culture – to the extent that, when the Musical World reviewed the recent London success of the Ninth Symphony (or what it called the 'Sinfonie Caractéristique') in 1838, it wrote:

Activated by [Nature's] sentiments, [Beethoven] arrayed the scenes of pastoral life with a rich garniture of thought ... the hilarity of mirthful peasantry, rejoicing in instructive unison with the festal splendour of a sunny landscape – the murmuring stream – the wakeful foliage – melody of birds, the balm-breathing zephyr; the indefinable sensations which throng the heart, at the repose of nature ... the moaning winds, the wild conflict of the storm, restless vehemence of the hurricane, the rolling volume of heaven's artillery.<sup>18</sup>

This extraordinary account of the Ninth, off the mark though it seems from a modern point of view, was far from bizarre for its time. Even the German-born violist at the Paris Opéra, Chrétien Urhan – who used to turn his chair away from the stage to avoid sight of dancers' legs – described the Ninth's scherzo in terms of 'des souvenirs champêtres, des images pastorales' in Le Temps of 1833.<sup>19</sup> In the 1830s, every one of Beethoven's compositions told the story of the countryside, the brook, the shepherds and the storm. Stressing the pantomimic above the balletic, Holmes filtered the self-same scenario through the Fifth, and then through all Beethoven's instrumental music:

We seem to be present at a village festival witnessing the voluntary pranks and comic dances of some half-drunken clown – thunder is heard in the distance, and sports for a time are suspended, till the finale bursts in, as it were, in a flood of sunshine and of joy. The

<sup>17</sup> George Hogarth, History, Biography and Criticism, 2 vols (London, 1838), I, 152.

<sup>18</sup> The Musical World 8 (1838), 273–75.

<sup>19</sup> For Urhan's words, see Katherine Kolb Reeve, 'Rhetoric and Reason in French Music Criticism of the 1830s', Peter Bloom, ed., Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties (Stuyvesant, 1987), 537–51, 544.

association with rural scenes is common with Beethoven – it is not only in his Pastoral Symphony that we hear the rich monotony of the cuckoo and the simple note of the quail.<sup>20</sup>

Remember that the opening of this passage describes the Fifth, as that from the Musical World did the Ninth: an indication that listener-viewer attendance at rural scenes did not necessarily depend on 'the music itself'. Symphonic form, in the public imagination, took on the geographic, ethnographic and meteorological significance of pastoral dance.

Such developments broke decisively with trends in the early century. One of the first performances of the Pastoral implied its reception as nothing more complicated than the imitation of Nature. At a concert in Vienna's Altweiner Augarten on 1 May 1811, many of the listeners heard the piece while they sat in the gardens outside the concert hall.<sup>21</sup> For later taste, such a faithful transfer between nature and music was dull. Like music, nature had to be interpreted, not just mimicked. 'The character of [a culture's] compositions for instruments is the test of the refinement of an age in musical taste', Holmes wrote. 'In instruments, there is gained', he explained, 'from mechanical skill and scientific research, a lever wherewith to move the world'.<sup>22</sup> The appeal of instrumental over vocal music – and the appeal of the Pastoral specifically – lay precisely in its ability to alter Nature, to re-engineer the Original scientifically. More than composed Nature, music was heard as the realization of an existing rival art, as a composed landscape (tone-painting), text (tone-poetry), drama (tone-play), or, eventually, as a composed ballet – as a cross-arts transcription of wordless gesture and picturesque movement. In 1837, Heine imagined 'reality' as the allegorical figure of a woman, a poetic danseuse spiritualised musically:

Between the theatre and reality lie the orchestra, the music, and the dividing line of footlights on the front. Reality, after having crossed the realm of music and the impressive row of lights, stands before us on the stage transfigured and revealed as poetry. The charming euphony of the music rings from her in dying echoes, and she is illumed as in a fairy vision by the mysterious lamps. It is all a magic sound and a magic gleam, which readily seem to a prosaic public to

<sup>20</sup> Holmes, 'Ludwig van Beethoven', 451.

<sup>21</sup> Theodor von Frimmel, 'Eine übersehene Aufführung der Pastoral Symphonie', Beethoven-forschung 8 (1918), 164–6.

<sup>22</sup> Holmes, 'Ludwig', 448.

be unnatural, and yet are far more natural than ordinary nature, for it is nature, elevated by art to its fairest divinity.<sup>23</sup>

Heine's vision of reality as a more or less female or balletic revision of nature is reminiscent of the young Schumann's equally gendered view of his art. In 1828, the young composer wrote, with his usual bluntness, that 'women could perhaps be regarded as the frozen, firm embodiments of music'.<sup>24</sup>

Given such gendered and mimoplastic ideas about music, the Pastoral quickly began to acquire associations with well-known paintings, poems and narratives, and in many cases (as we shall see) with the artistic reconciliation of these forms at the ballet-pantomime. Berlioz, for example, linked the symphony to fine art (Poussin), sculpture (Michelangelo) and poetry:

This astonishing landscape seems as if composed by Poussin and drawn by Michelangelo. The creator of Fidelio and the Eroica now sets out to depict the peace of the countryside and the gentle ways of shepherds.... But this poem of Beethoven's! These long phrases full of colour! these speaking images! these perfumes! this light! this eloquent silence! those vast horizons! those enchanted forest glens! those golden harvests!<sup>25</sup>

In England, the Musical World equated Beethoven's symphonies more generally with Rubens:

With [Beethoven], the Grand Symphony was a new, vivid, spiritual creation, as much the result of the bright dreams of imagination, as the wide-extended landscape of a Rubens.... With him, the stream, the torrent, the rustling leaf, were not only the visible and audible revelations of the world without, but the types and shadows of the world within us.<sup>26</sup>

In more directly dance-related cases, many critics paraphrased the influential writings of E.T.A. Hoffmann by describing Beethoven's music in otherworldly, ballet-like terms. In his 1813 description of the piano concertos, Hoffmann had prophetically set the stage for the lime-lit depictions of the late 1820s: 'Strange shapes begin a merry dance, now converging into a single point of light, now flying

<sup>23</sup> Heinrich Heine, 'The French Stage', in The Works of Heinrich Heine, trans. Charles Godfrey Leland, 12 vols (London, 1893), 203.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Ostwald, Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius (Boston, 1985), 87.

<sup>25</sup> Hector Berlioz, The Art of Music and Other Essays (A Travers Chants), trans. Elizabeth Csicsery-Rónay (Bloomington, 1994), 23-5.

<sup>26</sup> The Musical World 8 (1838), 273-5.



apart like glittering sparks, now chasing each other in infinitely varied clusters ... magical prescriptions from which [Beethoven] conjures forth an enchanted world'.<sup>27</sup>

By 1831, Hoffmannesque imaginings were all the rage. Holmes pictured the deaf, isolated Beethoven as a person cut off from the world. The dumbness of nature moved like a silent ballet-pantomime around him; his imagination supplied the accompanying music:

An eternal silence surrounding the composer is gratifying to the imagination, and, doubtless, Beethoven, amid the universal dumbness of nature, heard melodies more sweet than ever met the sensual ear. Has he not in his lonely forest walks surprised Pan and the wood nymphs, and peopled the solitudes about Vienna with shapes and sounds more than human?<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, an author for the *L'Artiste* of 1834 imagined that the Ninth's scherzo produced the effect of a playful dance of girls on a beautiful summer's night on the prairie. In an 1837 letter, to cite another instance inflected by ballet, Balzac described the Fifth Symphony in relation to 'fairies who flutter with womanly beauty and the diaphanous wings of angels'.<sup>29</sup> In Balzac's *César Birotteau* of the same year, an extraordinary passage occurs, typically extreme and tongue-in-cheek, but no less significant to the uncanny scenes of *ballet blanc*:

Among the works of Beethoven, there is a poetic fantasy which dominates the end of the C-minor symphony. After the slow introductory measures, the conductor's baton raises the rich curtain on a dazzling motif toward which the composer's magical powers have been converging.... A radiant fairy comes forward, lifting her wand; angels pull aside purple silk draperies.... The eye is drawn to a marvellous vista, a line of splendid palaces, which disgorge beings of some superior race. The altar of happiness is aflame and the incense of prosperity perfumes the air. Divinely smiling creatures in blue-trimmed white tunics display superhumanly beautiful faces and figures of infinite delicacy. Cupids flutter about, spreading flame from their torches. You feel yourself to be beloved, and inhale a bliss that is beyond your understanding, bathing in a harmony which provides everyone with the ambrosia of his choice. For a moment your most secret hopes are brought to fruition. Then, having

<sup>27</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann, *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, the Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*, ed. David Charlton, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge, 1989), 102.

<sup>28</sup> In referring to the 'sensual ear' and gardens built in the mind, Holmes alludes here to two poems in the Pastoral tradition by Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and 'Ode to Psyche', both written in 1819. These allusions do a powerful job of Anglicising Beethoven. Holmes, 'Ludwig', 459.

<sup>29</sup> For the *L'Artiste* of 9 February 1834, see James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1995), 273. For Balzac's comments: 'fées ... qui voltigent avec les beautés de la femme et les ailes diaprées de l'ange', see Jean-Pierre Barricelli, 'Balzac and Beethoven: the Growth of a Concept', *Modern Language Quarterly* 25 (1964), 412-24, 418.

transported you to the heavens, the magician leads you, by means of transitional basses, back to the world of cold reality. He has whetted your appetite for divine melody and you are still gasping: 'Encore!'<sup>30</sup>

From a modern point of view, Balzac's free fantasia on what might be the neoclassical scenes of some early nineteenth-century ballet d'action seems a poor description of the finale of the Fifth. The author's ironic tone aside, the mythological arrangements complete with fairy conductor move in ways that are difficult to shape to the score. What Balzac's narrator presents to us here, in this fabula of musical inspiration – not in this case pastoral – is not so much some finely etched Allegro in C as a description of the experience of listening to it. Beethoven's finale is little more than a stimulus to this physical experience, the auditor inhaling the sounds, the harmonies providing everyone with the opiate 'of his choice'. As he breathes in, the drug fills his lungs and courses through his body, inducing an unbound visual hallucination in the spirit of the Sixth, despite 'the music itself'.

The advent of this type of listening 'under the influence' owed much of its prevalence to the success of the Pastoral. So powerful was the Sixth's effect that its visuality was figured into the material discourse of the concert as representational form. Not only did the type and style of concert music come under review, but the mechanics of the cultural form shifted. Poetic interpolation, vocal items, work pairing, increasing 'noise' and distinct stage animation all featured in this change. The nuts and bolts of concert performance – scores, instruments, gesture, playbills, orchestral placements, programming, authority and cohesion – all re-situated themselves in relation to the new picturesque mode.

Three early English piracies of the Pastoral demonstrated how the new situation might be adapted to. Around 1810, the London publisher Lewis Lavenue (whose son later studied composition with Bochsá) released a set of orchestral parts of Beethoven's Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies edited by the violinist William Watts.<sup>31</sup> Kinsky-Halm reports the existence of a second publication ca. 1810 by Lavenue and Watts of the Pastoral as an arrangement for septet, an apparent response to the success of Beethoven's Septet in E flat major (op. 20). The Ira F. Brilliant Centre for Beethoven Studies has a third issue by the pair (ca. 1815) in a version for piano

<sup>30</sup> See Honoré de Balzac, César Birotteau, trans. Frances Frenaye (London, 1956), 162.

<sup>31</sup> Like the director of the Italian Opera, Watts was on the Board of Professors at the Royal Academy of Music when it opened in 1823. He was probably also in the orchestra pit on 22 June 1829 alongside the eminent double bassist Domenico Dragonetti. For more on Watts, see Adam Carse, The Orchestra from Beethoven to Berlioz (Cambridge, 1948), 182.

four hands, a copy re-stolen very soon after its English release by Simrock in Bonn in 1816/7.<sup>32</sup> These scores circulated without the composer's knowledge, approval, or financial benefit.<sup>33</sup> Breitkopf and Härtel's authorised transcription of the piece for four hands came out only in December 1822, some seven years after Watts' pirated version.

What was striking about Watts' arrangement was a series of unidentified quotations from James Thomson's poem *The Seasons* (1730) that punctuated the score. Except for the first movement's title, erroneously omitted in the first publication, the headings were copied from Lavenu's earlier edition of the orchestral parts. Despite the assurance in that edition that 'the editor has ... placed the words [of the titles] at the head of each Movement agreeably to the Original', the English translations, reading 'The Prospect', 'The Rivulet', 'The Village Dance', 'The Storm', and 'The Shepherd's Song', significantly abridged the German.<sup>34</sup> By way of compensation, however, when leafing through the later piano score the English consumer encountered long sections of poetry. The following, for example, introduced the 'The Prospect':

See the country far diffus'd around  
One boundless blush, one white empurpled shower  
Of mingled blossoms, where the raptured eye  
Hurries from joy to joy.

These poetic interpolations reflected typical concert practice of the time. When Haydn's *Creation* was performed under George Smart at Drury Lane on 17 March 1813, for example, it was 'Interspersed with Select and Appropriate

<sup>32</sup> Kinsky-Halm, *Das Werk Beethovens* (Munich, 1955), 163. A copy of Lavenu's ca. 1810 orchestral edition of op. 68 is in The British Library at R.M.17.f.11 (2).

<sup>33</sup> The status of Watts' publication is uncertain. In 1804, Clementi signed an agreement with Breitkopf and Härtel that automatically gave him English rights to all Beethoven's works acquired by the Leipzig company. Clementi, however, did not publish a single one of the five works the firm issued on the continent in 1809 (op. 67–70). This was either because Clementi declined his option, or because Beethoven had prevented him by writing on a signed receipt from Breitkopf and Härtel on 14 September 1808 that his five works were their exclusive property 'with the exception of England'; see Alan Tyson, *Authentic English Editions of Beethoven* (London, 1963), 52. This throws open the question as to whether Lavenu's English versions of the *Pastoral Symphony* were authorised by the composer. No evidence suggests contact between Beethoven and Watts/Lavenu at this or at any other time. The fact that most of the pirated English editions of op. 68 appear to have been entered at Stationer's Hall muddles things further. If indeed Watts' editions were unauthorised, they do not hold the distinction of being the first pirated publications of op. 68. Kühnel of Leipzig acquired their city competitor's new edition so quickly that an arrangement for piano and violin or flute of the *Pastoral Symphony* appeared only a few weeks after the June first edition in 1809.

<sup>34</sup> But for a number of slightly bewildering *sforzandi* (for example in bars 10 and 12), the text of Watts' ca. 1810 score is relatively faithful to Breitkopf and Härtel's first edition.

READINGS' from Milton's Paradise Lost.<sup>35</sup> The first time sections of the Pastoral appeared at the Drury Lane oratorio-concerts, on 18 February 1818, they were twinned with a vocal quartet by John Braham entitled 'A Hymn to Nature' and preceded by Mozart's Requiem. Four years previously, the Requiem had been performed at the same venue with spoken interludes from the 'Seatonian Prize Poem of Death by the late Bielby Porteous, Bishop of London'.<sup>36</sup>

As in the rest of Europe, liberal sprinklings of vocal music at concerts joined these poetic orations. The Philharmonic Society apparently lifted its ban on solo songs with pianoforte accompaniment in 1816 when Mozart's 'Dove sono' appeared, and excused the inclusion of Beethoven's song 'Adelaide' (op. 46) in 1817 on the grounds that it was a 'cantata'. A typical Philharmonic Concert of the 1820s divided itself into two 'Acts' – another indication of the dramatic nature of these events. Overtures, symphonies, concertos and chamber works alternated with arias, scenas and vocal ensembles. Like Thomson's poetry, these vocal diversions appealed to the 'raptured eyes' of the audience by investing concert performances with a word-based intelligibility and visual poignancy.

Vocal and instrumental items were often linked topically, as when the Pastoral was accompanied in 'Act 1' of the 23 March 1829 Philharmonic Concert by 'Through the Forests' from Weber's Der Freischütz. Handel's Acis and Galatea was another favourite partner for the Pastoral, the symphony being twinned in 'Act 2' of a 22 March 1824 Philharmonic Concert with 'Heart, the seat of soft delight'. According to the Musical World of 1838, this customary Handel-Beethoven pairing stemmed from the unidentified first performance of the Pastoral in England, probably – if a brief 1832 report in the Harmonicon is correct – by the performers of the Harmonic Society.<sup>37</sup> The writer recalled:

When Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony was first performed in this country, it was divided into two parts. The pause was relieved by the

<sup>35</sup> See amongst George Smart's collection of playbills at c.61.i.1 in The British Library. These text insertions are perhaps not surprising given that van Swieten's libretto for Haydn's secular oratorio borrowed from Milton's famous epic.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> The writer, probably copyist John Sterland, wrote: 'Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, and selections from Don Giovanni of Mozart, were performed [at the Harmonic Society] for the first time in England'; see The Harmonicon 10 (1832), 247.

introduction of the song, 'Hush, ye pretty warbling choir', from Acis and Galatea.<sup>38</sup>

Work pairing and poetic interpolation lent instrumental music discursive shape in much the same way as the increasingly detailed programmes and handbills did. The emergence of long-running music journals such as the Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review (1818–28/9) and the Harmonicon (1823–33) also addressed the newly attentive listener's need for clear meaning.<sup>39</sup>

A related development was the emerging taste for 'noise'. Increasingly, loudness became a feature of the English style – witness the incessant sforzandi Watts added to his piracies. Having attended a Philharmonic Society performance of Pastoral on 28 May 1821, Moscheles noted in his diary that 'the thundering timpani had a disturbing effect'. Fétis had a similar, though more favourable, experience eight years later when he heard the orchestra play the same piece. A few months on in 1829, the editor of the Revue musicale in Paris took home a pair of stouter English timpani sticks, in tribute to the timpanist at the Italian Opera and Philharmonic, Thomas Chipp.<sup>40</sup> Sheer volume increasingly became a priority not only for the Philharmonic, but also for the King's Theatre Band. By 1829, the latter salaried at least sixty players – a fact that drew several facetious comments in the press. When repairs to the north façade of the Opera House delayed the inaugural 'Grand Neapolitan Masquerade' of the season to 26 January, the New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal wrote:

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<sup>38</sup> The Musical World 5 (1838), 138. Vaughan's 1811 benefit concert, extraordinarily, included sixteen items, three of them extracts from Handel's large-scale choral works. None came from Acis and Galatea, however. Grove blames the Musical World's association of the Pastoral Symphony with Handel's serenata on Bochsa's 1829 concert. Since the journal's description of the London premiere bears not the slightest resemblance to Bochsa's concert, this assumption is unfounded. The Musical World report is further evidence of an earlier date for op. 68's London premiere; see Grove, Beethoven and his Nine Symphonies, 224.

<sup>39</sup> Four months before Bochsa's concert, on 15 March 1829, the Pastoral was heard at the Société de Concerts. A handbill for the performance, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, quoted Rousseau's Dictionnaire de musique in a footnote: 'Music paints all things; even those objects that are merely visible'; see Johnson, Listening in Paris: A Cultural History, 343.

<sup>40</sup> Fétis arrived in London for the 1829 season, to give two series of lectures (which never happened) and to accompany on the piano such singers as Malibran (this did not come off either). In the end, he used the time to put together several damning assessments of the musical scene. These appeared first in the magazine he edited, La Revue musicale of 1829, and later that year in the Harmonicon and the Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung. For all the sour grapes, Fétis was impressed with Chipp: 'The kettle-drums are played here with sticks both stronger and more fully rounded at the head, than those used in France; the effect produced appeared excellent; I particularly remarked this in the storm in Beethoven's pastoral symphony. I shall bring with me to Paris a pair of these drumsticks, in order to try the effect!'; see The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 216.



If the value of music is to be estimated by the quantity of sound, the King's Theatre, it cannot be denied, has stood foremost for some years past; that is to say, since the operas of Rossini have stunned our tympanums with the clangour of trumpets, horns, trombones, and kettledrums, which renders the fate of the walls of Jericho perfectly intelligible.<sup>41</sup>

Increasingly, too, aural stage effects were added to the 'shouting' orchestra. An 1820 issue of the Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review reported a performance at the Covent Garden Oratorios of Peter Winter's Battle Sinfonia and Henry Bishop's Battle of the Angels, complete with 'the storm apparatus of the theatre ... together with the cloud-compeller himself, who thunders, hails and rains at proper intervals'.<sup>42</sup> Even the Pastoral was not safe: when Louis Jullien moved to London later in the century, he re-scored the fourth movement with an obligato for tin box full of dried peas.<sup>43</sup> Such percussive illustration, while overwrought from a modern point of view, occurred not only because clearer delivery required projection, but because, like their counterparts on the continent, London's theatres frequently doubled as spaces for the performance of instrumental music. Concert hall and theatre, indeed, did not offer entirely different spaces for entirely different music, as modern views have assumed. Not only was the King's Theatre used to stage symphonic performances, to underline the point, but its adjoining concert room

<sup>41</sup> The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal 9 (1829), 62. For Moscheles' words, see Emil F. Smidak, Isaak-Ignaz Moscheles (Aldershot, 1988), 56. That the band consisted of 'upwards of sixty persons' is in Edward Wedlake Brayley, Historical and Descriptive Accounts of the London Theatres (London, 1826), 32. For a complete account of the repairs made to the King's Theatre for the 1829 season, see The Morning Chronicle (2 January 1829).

<sup>42</sup> The writer continues: 'The concord of all the sweet sounds that flow from the wharfs and the quays, from carts and carmen, drays and draymen, clerks, porters, wharfsingers, fish-wenchers, tide-waiters, and custom-house officers, sailors, lightermen and servants, all at once agglomerated in rapid, active, and hot conflict'; The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 3 (1820), 389. In 1855, Adolph Bernhard Marx seriously addressed Beethoven's failure to use stage effects: 'The estimate of the artistic value of ... simplicity is founded on debatable criteria. Why ... does one not paint picture-statues with flesh-tones and give them sentimental eyes? Why didn't Beethoven use theatre machines for the Pastoral Symphony, in order to depict the thunder and thunderstorms, and make the murmuring and whispering forms of springs and shrubs truly palpable?' See Adolph Bernhard Marx, Die Musik des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts und ihre Pflege. Methode der Musik (Leipzig, 1855), 90.

<sup>43</sup> Jullien's full name, a legacy of having 36 godfathers, was Louis George Maurice Adolphe Roch Albert Abel Antonio Alexandre Noé Jean Lucien Daniel Eugène Joseph-le-brun Joseph-Barème Thomas Thomas Thomas-Thomas Pierre Arbon Pierre-Maurel Barthélemi Artus Alphonse Bertrand Dieudonné Emanuel Josué Vincent Luc Michel Jules-de-la-plane Jules-Bazin Julio César Jullien! The theatricality of his conducting was legendary. For Beethoven symphonies, Jullien would arrange that a specially jewelled baton be brought to him on a silver salver. Slipping on white kid gloves, he would bring his performances to a climax by collapsing into a throne at the final cadence. His great ambition was to set the Lord's Prayer to music. 'Imagine the title page', he once wrote, 'music by Louis Jullien, words by Jesus Christ'; see Ronald Pearsall, Victorian Sheet Music Covers (Newton Abbot, 1972), 16.

was fitted out with curtained boxes and the dressings of a small theatre.<sup>44</sup> If 'noise-makers' were available and theatrically effective in a concert setting, in other words, they were used.

The increasing Europe-wide tendency to mount orchestras above eye-level (rather than on concert room floors) strengthened the emerging sense of stage-platform blurring. As eminent a theorist as Adolphe Bernhard Marx was swayed into re-envisaging instrumental music in line with such developments; his 1824 reading of the *Pastoral* was literally an essay in gesture and movement. For him, the Sixth was stage-like. The orchestral 'body' was brought to life under a single composer-director; the separate players were actor-dancers:

To portray extrinsic conditions through the orchestra without explanatory words, without the support of pantomime (as in ballet), became [Beethoven's] task in the *Pastoral* Symphony.... The orchestra became for him an animated chorus engaged in physical action ... everything was now united: psychological development connected to a series of extrinsic circumstances, represented in a thoroughly dramatic action of these instruments that form the orchestra.<sup>45</sup>

Stage animation and 'dramatic action' could be observed quite literally on concert prosceniums. An article in the *Harmonicon* of 1830 illustrating this, complained that the orchestra of the Philharmonic had 'scattered' out across the King's Concert Room proscenium like actors on a stage.<sup>46</sup>

Spread-out arrangements, while they certainly affected orchestral cohesion, had more to them than a lack of care. Visually appealing, they emerged from the same impetus for physical action that, when aligned with the desire for instrumental unity, gave rise to the modern orchestral conductor. An 1829 issue of the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* reported that recent London performances of the *Pastoral* on 23 March (by the Philharmonic Society) and 15 April (by the Committee of Professors of Music) required a specially designed square piano to replace the harp-shaped instruments generally in use. This meant that the 'conductor', who

<sup>44</sup> After the Argyll Rooms went up in flames in 1830 (along with Bochs's publishing business and the Regent's Harmonic Institution), the Philharmonic Society was obliged to lease the King's Concert Rooms attached to the King's Theatre for orchestral performances. In response to the change of venue, the *Harmonicon* wrote: 'The great room of the Opera-house, now converted into a small theatre ... [is] the finest music-room in London; we may venture to say, in Europe', see *The Harmonicon* 8 (1830), 174.

<sup>45</sup> Extracted from a reprint of a *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* review of 12 May 1824, in Wayne M. Senner, *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by his German Contemporaries* (Lincoln, 1999), 67.

<sup>46</sup> See *The Harmonicon* 8 (1830), 174.

traditionally 'presided at the pianoforte' on the model of his ballet or opera counterpart, could participate more fully in physically co-ordinating the ensemble. Traditional English practice required that the maestro al cembalo act as a kind of absent composer, remaining passive at the keyboard, leaving orchestral cohesion to the leader (the first violin), providing tempo indications at the beginning of movements, and playing only when error required correction. Within three months of Bochsá's concert, George Smart, who 'presided' at both the March and April performances of the Pastoral, probably used eye, hand and arm movements carefully designed to deal with the technical challenges of the piece. The Magazine explained: 'In Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, which requires the fullest activity of eye, ear, and hand, we have observed a square [pianoforte] used at the Philharmonic concerts'.<sup>47</sup>

Other evidence suggests that the emergence of body movements and baton conducting in England had more to it than the demands of strict ensemble. On 8 February 1826, Weber, about to 'preside' at a concert of instrumental and vocal selections from Der Freischütz, took up his place, probably on a raised platform in the centre of the orchestral pit, at Covent Garden. Charlotte Moscheles only remembered the noise the audience made:

Could no one see that Weber himself was conducting? I'm sure I don't know, but the screams and hubbub in the gallery while the overture was played ... made my blood boil; when common ballads and songs began afresh, the gods were once more all attention and good behaviour.<sup>48</sup>

The Harmonicon reported his entry differently:

[Weber] took his place on the stage, facing the audience, with a baton in his hand, with which he gave the time to the orchestra. In this office he seemed in no way embarrassed, and showed much energy and decision.<sup>49</sup>

This journal's account of Weber's performance is extraordinary. At one of the earliest instances of a 'time-giver' appearing publicly in England, the conductor's physical gestures were not so much provided for the benefit of the players, but for the pleasure of an audience. Weber's bold movements, performed with his back to the orchestra and serving more an expressive than a functional purpose, represented to

<sup>47</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 10 (1829), 314.

<sup>48</sup> Charlotte Moscheles, Life of Moscheles, ed. A. D. Coleridge, 2 vols (London, 1873), I, 125.

<sup>49</sup> The Harmonicon 4 (1826), 85. The underlining is mine.

listener-viewers a visual analogue of what his music expressed. Weber's conducting was an act of realisation: a translation of instrumental music into the more physically 'real' and precise medium of bodily movement. Indeed, his musical gestures caused a huge sensation, influencing Bochsa, for one, to open the King's Theatre for rehearsals in 1828, so that he could 'enhance his consequence' by conducting to the audience from the stage.<sup>50</sup> Charles Burney's lurid characterisation of the late eighteenth-century conductor as a 'coryphaeus' (dancer) in his An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon (1785) became a reality in 1826, when Weber brought the secure expressive motions of the ballet-pantomime to London's concert culture.<sup>51</sup>

### **Ballet trends: reading the body**

Ironically, while concert forms increasingly shifted towards miming models of signification, ballet inclined towards an early nineteenth-century mode of concert-like 'music-play'. From a modern perspective, ballet would appear to resemble symphonic music, if at all, in that both communicate without the aid of words. What mutuality they share, put another way, derives from an absence of linguistic content. In a broad sense, while the what of ballet and instrumental music is always in question (do they express emotion, physical objects, feelings?), they share a common expressive mode – a common how – that is remote from narrative, song, opera and fiction. But this apparent proximity (ballet remains more visual than the concert), was not always based on a mutual lack of word-based sense.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, as Marian Smith has shown, ballet d'action occupied a relatively stable discursive position among the

<sup>50</sup> Cyril Ehrlich has recently dismissed the view that Spohr caused 'the triumph of the baton, as a time-giver' in London (a claim made in Spohr's autobiography) after a Philharmonic Society concert on 10 April 1820. Spohr did actually use a baton in 1820, but only in rehearsal, not performance. That the baton was still unfamiliar in London by 1829 is confirmed by the stir Mendelssohn caused when he produced his for the Philharmonic Society on 24 May 1829 (see Chapter One). Bochsa probably still used a long mop-stick in the manner of Lully at the 1828 King's Theatre rehearsals; see Cyril Ehrlich, First Philharmonic (Oxford, 1995), 33; see also Nettel, The Orchestra in England: A Social History, 98. In 1829, one of the anonymous 'non-conforming members of the late orchestra' of the King's Theatre writes: 'Now the Opera House, during the last season, admitted at least as numerous an audience to its rehearsals; but imparted none of its benefit to the Band; except, indeed the edifying sight of 'honest Iago' [Bochsa] on stage, breaking the time with a long mop-stick, in order to enhance his consequence by astonishing the inexperienced'; see An Explanation of the Differences Existing between the Manager of the Italian Opera [P. F. Laporte] and the Non-Conforming Members of the Late Orchestra. Written among Themselves (London, 1829), 32.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Burney, 'Commemoration of Handel', An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon (London, 1785), 14.

arts.<sup>52</sup> The 'silent dialogues' of the coryphée were complex enough to carry complicated historical plots; the pantomime was regarded as more competent, for example, than the frozen language of painting. As one of the more synaesthetic of the arts, dance could rely on a range of cross-arts referents to shore up narrative intelligibility:

The principal dancer at the King's Theatre says, 'The ballet-master, like a prism, should unite in himself those rays of light, which a general knowledge of the fine arts spreads over the mind, and his productions will then be tinged with those beautiful hues which such a knowledge must ever impart, embellishing them with an interesting and fading charm. In poetry, painting, sculpture, and music, he will discover a treasure of materials; great art, taste, and fancy, however are necessary to employ such advantages successfully. The exalted style of dancing should present us with the attitudes and contours of Correggio, Albano and Guido; every movement, every step, should convey a sentiment.

The Lady's Magazine, 31 March 1829

Historically indebted to painting and sculpture, the ballet-pantomime of the late 1820s was highly articulate. By coding the immobile units of the 'living picture' or tableau vivant into its narrative-temporal discourse, mime achieved an extraordinary degree of comprehensiveness.<sup>53</sup>

Situated somewhere between modern notions of drama and painting, the tableau vivant employed stage sets and living (if motionless) subjects in costume to realize well-known painterly or sculptural attitudes for the pleasure of drawing room or theatre audiences. Episodes in Goethe's Die Wahlverwandtschaften (Elective Affinities), a novel published in the same year as the first edition of the Pastoral Symphony (1809), established the popularity of the hybrid form.<sup>54</sup> Beethoven, for one, had close associations with the 'living picture'. The first Viennese performance of his Fifth Piano Concerto (op. 73) with the twenty-one-year-old Carl Czerny, took

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<sup>52</sup> See Smith, Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle, xi.

<sup>53</sup> Historically, acting treatises and dance manuals modelled themselves on influential studies of painting such as Charles le Brun's illustrated Méthode pour apprendre à Dessiner les Passions (1734). Jean-Philippe Rameau's acte de ballet Pigmalion (1748) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's monodrama of the same name (1770) carried forward the general obsession with the love-interest as an artwork (or sculpture). The sculptural-pictorial inclinations of dance were realised closer to the 1820s in Johann Hummel's 1809 ballet, Das belebte Gemählde, which hinged on this fascination with a female 'picture' coming to life.

<sup>54</sup> In the novelist's story, the characters Luciane and Otilie indulge in 'natural picture-making', and the performance of Dyck's Belisarius, Poussin's Ahasuerus and Esther and Terburg's Paternal Admonition amidst musical overtures and interludes. This tableau vivant, the narrator tells of the last of these three representations, 'was beyond question inordinately superior to the original picture'; see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Elective Affinities, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth, 1978), 192.



place on 11 February 1812 at a charity performance at the Kärntnertheater under the heading 'Concert und Vorstellung drey berühmter Gemählde' (Concert and Presentation of Three Famous Paintings). The concerto was flanked by three-minute performances of Raphael's The Queen of Sheba Greeting Solomon and Poussin's The Swooning of Esther; Troyes' Haman Seized at Ahasuerus' Command in the Presence of Esther appeared later.<sup>55</sup> On 23 June 1830, to cite a related instance, Bochsa translated Haydn's Seasons into an artwork incorporating illustrative 'Tableaux Vivans' [sic].<sup>56</sup>

Closely affiliated to these tableaux, ballet frequently staged familiar pictures at moments of heightened tension, or used them to make situational summaries at the end of acts. Much of the intervening action, while it might not refer directly to well-known coded images, unfolded in a similarly pictorial-narrative style. Shifting from one frozen linguistic unit to the next, the emerging figure of the danseuse made smooth transitions between framed moments in the same way that 'dissolving views' in panoramic exhibitions mediated between narrative shot-sequences.<sup>57</sup> Continuously unfolding freeze-frames presented the viewer with a stop-start framework in which to read the dramatic and painterly sentiment of the human arrangements before the story moved on. Compensating for the vagueness of the painted image, these ever-modifying still lives lent fine art a more human, discursive

<sup>55</sup> For a description of 11 February 1812 concert, see Kirsten Gram Holmström, Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants (Stockholm, 1967), 224–5 and 217. A. de la Garde-Chambonas in his Fêtes et Souvenirs du Congrès de Vienne (Brussels, 1843), 226 reports a conversation with Princess Esterházy at the Congress, where she claimed that Haydn, her Kapellmeister, improvised at the organ while similar paintings to those performed in Vienna were realised at a temple built for that purpose in the middle of a lake in Eisenstadt. Haydn's music, de la Garde-Chambonas noted, 'added wonderfully to the illusion'. Thomas Grey writes that much of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony 'is not so much aspiring to a fully narrative or dramatic mode of representation as it is reconceiving a pictorial one, as a sonorous tableau vivant'; see Grey, 'Tableaux Vivants: Landscape, History Painting, and the Visual Imagination in Mendelssohn's Orchestral Music', 38–76.

<sup>56</sup> A playbill for this concert survives in the Harvard Theatre Collection. Bochsa's claim on the bill that the art form had 'never yet been introduced to this Country' must have been an exaggeration. His 1830 concert also featured his own Bard's Dream concerto accompanied by double orchestra, Henriette Meric-Lalande and Maria Malibran in Rossini's Semiramide, the great Marie Taglioni dancing a divertissement, and Beethoven's Wellingtons Sieg complete with 'a Grand Intrada' involving 'Mr Cooke's magnificent Stud of Horses'.

<sup>57</sup> In December 1848, the first movement of the Pastoral Symphony was co-opted into the calm beginnings of a panoramic exhibition of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 at the Royal Cyclorama and Music Hall in Regent's Park. The music was supplied by Bevington's Apollonicon, a 'grand machine organ' (the musician's equivalent of the set-designer's eidophusicon) with 16 pedals and 2,407 pipes. Selections from Mozart's Don Giovanni, Auber's Masaniello, and Rossini's Mosè in Egitto also added to the narrative sequence of unfolding images; see Description of the Royal Cyclorama or Music Hall (London, 1848).

and precise vocabulary. The dead substance of paint and the stilted experience of gallery-going was brought into a more 'written' and dialogic stage-life.<sup>58</sup>

In light of the often complex succession of pictures, dance's narrative clarity relied heavily on the competence listener-viewers attached to reading mimed units. The intricacies of each stage action were filtered not only through the sign-language of the ballerinas, but through detailed synopses printed in programmes, texted signs mounted on scenery, and the received semantic meanings of musical quotations from familiar operatic or instrumental sources. As Smith has shown, even opera took the opportunity to bolster itself with dance-codings. The mute figure of Fenella in Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (1828), for example, 'spoke' her part entirely through movement. Mime at the opera on one hand, and verbal play at the ballet on the other, brought two latterly distinct forms into proximity. Ballet inclined towards the more precise, vocal character of opera, while opera, the more obviously verbal medium, leant towards the obscure motions of its partner. Ballet 'spoke' a detailed sign-language; opera 'moved' in broad, abstract gestures.

#### **Composing movement: from embodied word to sounding gesture**

By the time of Bochsa's concert, however, this was beginning to change, as ballet-pantomime began to acquire the abstract motions of the concert hall and move away from the stop-start verbal formulas of sign-speech towards an abstract style of pictured movement. The shift towards what was 'seen' in concert music was manifested in the decline of complicated historical plots, the emergence of the magical body of the spiritualised ballerina, the fading influence of well-known word-specific 'attitudes', and, more crucially, the wholesale theft of a pre-existing concert hall repertory. In the late 1820s, ballet-pantomime moved from the intricate text-based form of its past (communicating units of action), and steadily became a pastoral analogue of what was 'pictured' in the concert hall. While the concert rectified its imprecise disposition by growing more body- and eye-centred, ballet-pantomime grew towards concert by becoming more mind- and ear-centred.<sup>59</sup> Given

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<sup>58</sup> Somewhere between fiction and drama was the curious sub-genre of the illustrative picture, found in the early editions and serial publications of Dickens, Thackeray, Ainsworth and others. At points of heightened tension, these illustrations functioned in ways similar to the *tableau vivant*-type scenes of contemporary ballet. They punctuated the action by crystallizing the prevailing sentiment of the text into a single, visual moment; see Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> See Ivor Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in England* (London, 1954), 36.

the ensuing resemblance of the arts, and the difficulty of tying down how instrumental music meant in the 1820s, the ballet-pantomime provides a conveniently graphic picture of listener-viewer response to orchestral forms at the time.<sup>60</sup>

Around 1829, as we have seen, the ideas of both symphonic and balletic abstraction had far more picturesque associations than the modern imagination has allowed. The figure of the silently-speaking danseuse, engaged in complex dialogues on stage, communicating complex operatic plots, was only just beginning to be supplemented by the sentimental picture of the white-clad ballerina. The latter was an ethereal image in an illusionistic world, passing before the listener-viewer's mind like a piece of 'pictured' nineteenth-century instrumental music. Perhaps not 'musical' in a modern sense, the evocatively emerging vision of the ballerina was pictorial-musical in early nineteenth-century terms. She was the physical embodiment of a shift from the coded securities of silent dialogue into the more shadowy and hence more musical realms of the supernatural. In the early 1830s, the ballet-pantomime would become mind-focussed, with immaterial beings such as Marie Taglioni's La Sylphide (1832) skimming across the stage, defying the laws of gravity and taking flight before the mind's eye of the listener-viewer.<sup>61</sup>

Neatly expressing the tension between the intersecting future (ballet-pantomime-féerie) and the past (ballet d'action) were the two principal dancers at the King's Theatre in the 1829 season, Élisabeth Vaque-Moulin (of whom more later) and Pauline Leroux.

Leroux was a product of the Académie Royale in Paris, widely acclaimed for her pantomime. Her 31 January 1829 London début as the sleepwalker, Thérèse, in the ballet-pantomime La Somnambule, drew critical attention for the success of its 'speaking' action. The Morning Chronicle wrote that 'her simulation of the appearance of a person under influence of the malady which has occasioned her

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<sup>60</sup> Although still present enough in 1829 to induce the translation of a finished symphony into the language of a ballet-pantomime, the category of modern music-play would have to wait for Leonide Massine's notion of 'symphonic ballet' in the 1930s to gain full respectability. Late twentieth-century performances of Beethoven's Sixth in this vein include James Kudelka's critically acclaimed Pastorale for the National Ballet of Canada in 1990, and Milko Sparembek's version for the Ballet Nacional de España Clásico in 1984. These differ markedly from Bochsa's production, however, in that music and dance were not pictorially illustrative of each other. Though they existed in parallel, bodies and music ran alongside each other in autonomous realms, the dancers in neutral dress, performing entirely formal routines to the hermetically sealed strains of pure sounding form.

<sup>61</sup> La Sylphide was first performed at the Paris Opéra on 12 March 1832, appearing soon after on 13 June 1833 at the King's Theatre.

distress is so perfect; the glazed and steady, open but unconscious eye; the step, the air – are all so well assumed as to place Mademoiselle Pauline at the very head of her art'.<sup>62</sup> Leroux was also largely responsible for one of the most successful productions at the King's Theatre for a decade. A danced version of La Muette de Portici (1828), Masaniello; ou, le pêcheur de Portici, cast Leroux as Fenella, another 'disabled' leading character.

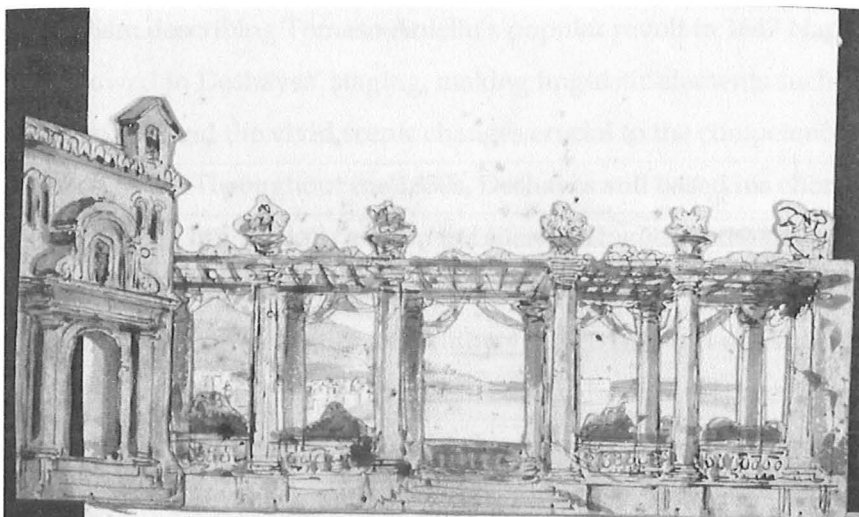
As the music director particularly responsible for dance, Bochsa drastically rearranged Auber's score to suit the needs of what newspaper advertisements called 'an historical ballet'. The choreography was by the same dance-master who would later provide the mise en scène for the Symphonie pastorale, André Jean-Jacques Deshayes, who boasted a long and illustrious fellowship with the King's Theatre. Deshayes merits a brief digression. For three decades, his skills as a dancer were celebrated in London and Paris for unsurpassed 'poetry of motion', his idiosyncratic style of quitting the stage with a leap adding to the flair of his movements. In 1795 he was a principal at the Paris Opéra and danced in Lisbon, Madrid and La Scala, Milan. As the newly-appointed director of ballet at the Italian Opera in London, he began to associate his talents as a choreographer with the monumental scenic effects, grand spectacle and exotic colour of Masaniello (1829), Kenilworth (1831), Faust (1833), Beniowsky (1836) and Le Brigand de Terracina (1837).<sup>63</sup> A revolution in the scenic department under the set designers William and Thomas Grieve contributed to his success, as did his close ties with the new manager of the opera house from that season, Pierre Laporte. 1829 saw the beginnings of a theatrical collaboration responsible for a decade of ballet-pantomime in London that had no parallel elsewhere, not even in St Petersburg or Paris.

Returning to Leroux as Fenella: the New Monthly Magazine described 'the impressiveness of her [pantomimic] action and gesticulation, the feeling which she throws into every scene'.<sup>64</sup> The intricacy of the operatic plot, a piece of historical

<sup>62</sup> La Somnambule was choreographed by Jean Aumer, supplied with a libretto by Scribe, and scored by Hérold for its first performance on 19 September 1827 at the Paris Opéra. For the London adaptations by Deshayes, see The Morning Chronicle (9 February 1829).

<sup>63</sup> Deshayes produced, or collaborated in, at least twenty-two ballets between 1806 and 1842 at the King's theatre. He danced in many more. The True Briton of 13 January 1800 noted that his 'manner of escaping from the stage by a spring seemed ... novel, and was admired'; see Guest, The Romantic Ballet in England, 23. His 'poetry of motion' is described in The Examiner of 1818, cited in John Chapman, 'Dance in Transition: 1809–1830', Dancing Times 68/810 (1878), 334–5.

<sup>64</sup> The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal 9 (1829), 204. Masaniello opened at the King's Theatre on the 24 March 1829.



Plates 6 and 7. *Left and below*. William and Thomas Grieve's set designs for Masaniello; ou le pêcheur de Portici (King's Theatre, 1829). Grieve Collection, 574 and 563; by permission of the Senate House Library, University of London. Manuscript parts for choruses (sung in Italian) are preserved in 'Lord Chamberlain's Plays', The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 42,895. A lone libretto for this ballet also survives in the Cornell University Library.

Edward Holmes, having complimented Bochsia on the new choruses ('of more interest than in the original opera'), wrote: 'We were much pleased with the view of Portici, with fishermen occupied in mending their nets; but that of the market-place at Naples, with the picturesque grouping and costume of the populace, was one of the happiest and best designed spectacles we ever witnessed. The illusion transported us beyond the "ignorant present" – we were for a time in Italy'; see The Atlas IV/150 (29 March 1829), 233b-c.

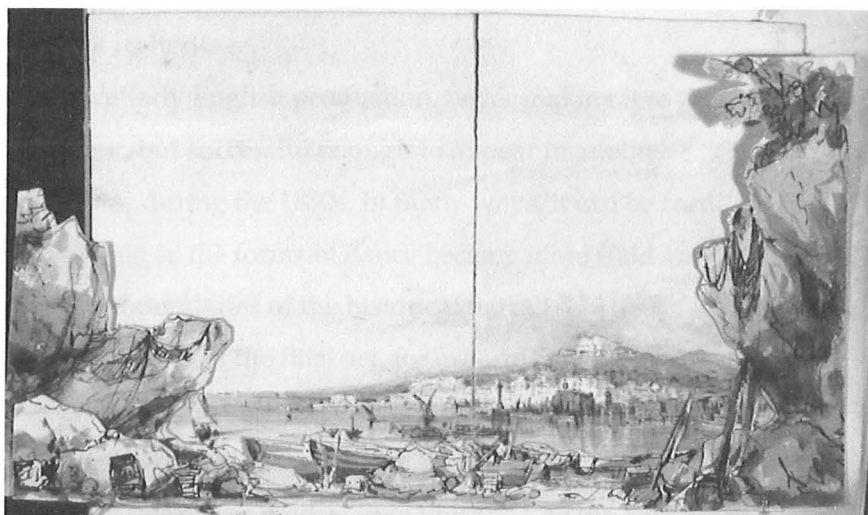


Plate 8. *Left*. A set design for the English premiere of Rossini's Le Comte Ory, which premiered in Italian translation at the King's Theatre on 28 February 1829. Grieve Collection, Senate House Library, University of London, 174.



realism describing Tomaso Aniello's popular revolt in 1647 Naples, was largely followed in Deshayes' staging, making linguistic elements such as Leroux's mute language and the vivid scenic changes crucial to the competence of the ballet's narrative.<sup>65</sup> Throughout the 1830s, Deshayes still based his choreography on the coryphée's mimic skills and on the silent dialogues of the ballet d'action, even though the demand for realism meant that he had to pepper the stage with 'disabled' characters. His realisation of Kenilworth (1831), based on Sir Walter Scott's novel (and, incidentally, the first ballet to be seen by an eleven-year-old Princess Victoria) introduced set dances only in the third scene of the first act, and again in the final act. The 'speaking' character of ballet-pantomime in 1829 was still very much in focus, but its envy for music was eroding the precision and perceived realism of Leroux's discourse. Choreographers, in general, were increasingly detaching mime scenes from the general flow of the dance, as the sinuous world of ballet blanc played against the coded expressiveness of its heritage.

Masaniello (1829) was a peculiarly English production, never making it to the Paris Opéra in Bochsa's arrangement, but successful enough to appear in another five productions at the King's Theatre during the 1830s. In many ways, it can be read as the last gasp of 'pure' ballet d'action as the forms of dance became more fluid and the heightened spectacle pushed the boundaries of the historical narrative. The exhibition of a volcanic eruption at the end of the final act, for example, threatened the credibility of the piece. 'Vesuvius vomits forth her subterranean fires', the New Monthly Magazine reported, 'the molten lava streams down the sides of the volcano; and Fenella, unwilling to survive the fate of her brother [just poisoned by the Viceroy], plunges into the liquid fire'.<sup>66</sup> The amount of money spent on the scenery and machinists for the ballet-pantomime during John Ebers' management (1821-28), suggested the extent to which the visual character of the dance form stretched the verisimilitude of the plot.<sup>67</sup> The complex sets of William and Thomas Grieve, while crucial in adding exactness to both Leroux's silent speech and the ballet-pantomime's

<sup>65</sup> These scene changes usually happened in front of the audience, not behind a drop-curtain. They thus served a dramatic or narrative function.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> 'The machinery is often very ingenious [at the King's Theatre]', Foote wrote in 1829, 'especially in the ballet'; see Horace Foote, A Companion to the Theatres; and Manual of the British Drama (London, 1829), 13.

diffuse sense of narrative, ended up projecting stage-events towards the insecurities of spectacle, magical diversion and music-like abstraction.<sup>68</sup>

While snippets of well-known music routinely added security and intertextual referents to ballet's increasing elusiveness, large-scale orchestral borrowing increasingly achieved the opposite aim, as whole sections of symphonic and operatic music transformed dance into an abstract type of concert. François-Henri-Joseph Castil-Blaze had noticed the potential for this as early as 1822:

A ballet was an interesting concert, where all the genres of music came together to please the audience with seductive variety. The lovers of the new style applauded Mozart and Beethoven.... I would not [underestimate] the power of known melody, and of the clarity they bring to the silent dialogues of the pantomime.<sup>69</sup>

Bochsa, like his colleagues at the Paris Opéra, Jean Aumer, Ferdinand Hérold, Fromental Halévy and Casimir Gide, was adept at appropriating popular melodies with clear discursive meanings from the operatic stage and the concert hall. The 'immaculate High-Priest of the Temple of Terpsichore',<sup>70</sup> as his colleagues at the King's Theatre once called him, built his reputation on re-composing familiar melodies by Mozart, Rossini and Beethoven. It was not unusual for the ballet composer to copy whole sections of a concert work into his scores, as when Bochsa's opera-ballet *I Messicani* (*The Mexicans*) introduced an overture 'taken from an Opera of Beethoven's' (presumably *Fidelio*) to the English public on 20 March 1829.<sup>71</sup> Such exploitation of Beethoven's 'intellectual property' – not a widely recognized commodity in the 1820s – was not unique to London, borrowing being just as common at the Paris Opéra ballet. It is extraordinary but in some sense not surprising that one of the first times a Parisian audience heard the finale of Beethoven's Fifth was at curtain-up in Act I of Aumer's ballet-pantomime, *Le Page*

<sup>68</sup> Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (1828) appeared in many guises in London. The success of the ballet-pantomime version at the King's Theatre led to melodramatic adaptations at the Coburg Theatre in 1829 (*Masaniello or the Dumb Girl of Portici*), at the Drury Lane Theatre (in an adaptation by Kenney), and even an equestrian arrangement at Astley's Amphitheatre (*Masaniello, or the Revolt of Naples*); see *The Dramatic Magazine* 1 (1829), 97, 99 and 113.

<sup>69</sup> From a review of *Alfred le Grand* (1822), quoted in Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle*, 120–1.

<sup>70</sup> See *An Explanation of the Differences Existing between the Manager of the Italian Opera [P. F. Laporte] and the Non-Conforming Members of the Late Orchestra*. Written among Themselves, 39.

<sup>71</sup> *The Morning Chronicle* (20 March 1829). *Fidelio* was premiered in London in 1832, at a time when sung German was relatively familiar to English audiences. 'Mr Shütz's German Company' had staged a version of *Der Freischütz* in German at Covent Garden (3 June 1829); see *The Morning Chronicle* (4 June 1829). Sontag also arranged for selections from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* to be performed in German at her benefit concert in London on 18 June 1829.

Inconstant. Premiered on 18 December 1823 and brought to the King's Theatre on 10 June 1824, Le Page was a choreographed realization of Beaumarchais' Le Mariage de Figaro, drawing heavily on the score of Mozart's Le nozze di Figaro via an 1819 Viennese version for a parody ballet-pantomime by Adalbert Gyrowetz. Aumer assigned Jean-François Habeneck, the conductor most responsible for making Beethoven's symphonies known in France in the late 1820s, to cobble together the music for his 1823 production. Habeneck aligned Figaro's measuring of the floor in the opening act to the C major apotheosis of Beethoven's finale. The oddness (to us) of the borrowing notwithstanding (Habeneck's alignment probably pointed up the 'measured science' of the extract), these musical quotations started out as referents to clarify the course of the ballet-pantomime's action. By the late 1820s, however, they were actually turning the genre into a visually perceived musical form – 'an interesting concert'.<sup>72</sup>

Pulling towards the hazy pictorial-musical realms of fantasy and representing newer developments was the other new face on London's 1829 stage, Élisabeth Vaque-Moulin. Trained at La Scala and the San Carlo in Naples, Vaque-Moulin arrived in London in the early season and attracted the first coherent attention the English press gave to the fact that a coryphée was on pointes: 'standing, walking, and running with great rapidity, and in due cadence on the extremities of her feet' or 'running about the stage on her toes in a wonderful manner'.<sup>73</sup> To celebrate her talents in a manner commensurate with the celebration of Leroux's skills in 'disabled' roles, Bochsa and Deshayes immediately arranged another 'parody ballet', Les Déguisements imprévus (1829) from the remnants of Adrien Boieldieu's opéra comique, La Fête du village (1816). Without a story distinctly told, the ballet was set in 'very handsome Tyrolese scenery' and involved a loose collection of events based on mistaken identity and pastoral love. As usual, Bochsa compiled the score from various sources, including snippets from Boieldieu, Rossini and, probably most extensively, Beethoven. The first performance took place on 16 June, just six days

<sup>72</sup> For details of the score of Le Page inconstant, see Smith, Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle, 84–93. Gide and Halévy, the composers responsible for the music in the ballet-opéra, La Tentation (premiered in Paris on 20 June 1832) and at least another twelve productions at the Paris Opéra before 1844, had a particular fondness for Beethoven. La Tentation quoted from the Fifth Symphony's finale in Act 2 scene 2 ('the joyful assembly of the demons') and used themes from the op. 13 piano sonata in C minor ('Pathétique'). Schneitzhoeffter's score for La Sylphide (1832) used the fugal entries of J. S. Bach's triple Fugue in F major from Das wohltemperierte Klavier II to co-ordinate the appearance of three witches; *Ibid.*, 61, 103.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted from an anonymous newspaper critic in Chapman, 'Dance in Transition: 1809–1830', 335, and in Morning Advertiser (22 June 1829).

before that of the Symphonie pastorale, the plot of which was closely related. The newspaper reviews in the Morning Chronicle, Sunday Times and Morning Journal single out Vaque-Moulin ('an exquisite artiste') for her 'very agreeable entertainment ... frequently applauded', her 'agreeable and indeed novel style of ... dancing' and her 'powers of an extraordinary kind'. 'The applause given to her share of the performance', the Times wrote, 'was perhaps greater than has ever been bestowed on a dancer at this theatre'.<sup>74</sup>

The lack of narrative structure in Les Déguisements imprévus led the Morning Journal to suggest that the piece, although in two acts, lay 'between a divertissement and a regular ballet'. The increasing loss of 'speech' in ballet-pantomimes meant that it was becoming difficult for listener-viewers to follow sophisticated plots. The decline of the heeled shoe in the late 1790s, the heightened athleticism of an increasing number of women on stage, and the recent introduction of gas lighting at the King's Theatre (1818) implied a steady distancing of the listener-viewer from the theatrical illusion. The falling-off of the interactive readings of pantomime dialoguée was transforming the listener-viewer into a voyeur who observed from a distance the magical picture-play occurring beyond the proscenium. The appearance of this pictorial mode of spectatorship in the late 1820s was linked both to the emerging role of the female figurante as a fairy, angel, sylph or nymph, and to the developing mythic universe of the ballet-pantomime. The danseuse's body increasingly moved by feeling. It became immaterial, and, at least in the sense of its aspirations, more profoundly 'musical'. In the case of Vaque-Moulin, this immateriality was expressed technically, 'in a state very nearly approaching nudity', in the spiritualised language of pirouettes and pointes, her body transforming itself into a transitive, fleeting and elusive vision of womanhood 'more than human'.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Taken from reviews in The Morning Chronicle (17 June 1829), The Morning Journal (17 June 1829), The Sunday Times (21 June 1829) and The Times (16 June 1829). It is tempting to speculate, given that Beethoven borrowed the final-movement theme from a familiar alpine ranz des vaches, that large sections of especially the finale's 'Hirtengesang' were incorporated into this production. The Symphonie pastorale may have been the natural outcome of the musical tendencies presented by Les Déguisements imprévus. For a description of the ranz des vaches as 'a melody which for centuries has been sung, or played on the Alphorn to summon the cows from the lofty pastures above the tree-line in the Alps' and its relation to Beethoven's op. 68, see A. Hyatt King, 'Mountains, Music and Musicians', Musical Quarterly 31/4 (1945), 395-419, 397.

<sup>75</sup> See The Harmonicon 8 (1829), 168. For those conservative critics who saw ballet-pantomime more in terms of human physicality than respectable illusion, the increasing 'immateriality' of the coryphée's body was accompanied not only by a heightened athleticism, but an associated shedding of large amounts of clothing (especially in the leg area). For many reviewers, the dream-world she was supposed to inhabit was more flesh and blood than they were encouraged to believe. Vaque-Moulin

While in the early century the dancer had been accustomed to presenting her body to be 'read', by 1829 she increasingly began recompose herself 'musically'.

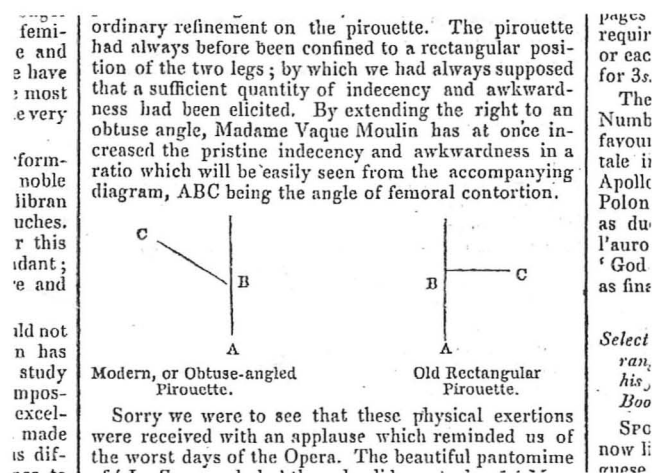


Plate 9. 'The meaning of [Vaque-Moulin's] motions (and what is dancing without meaning?) we were utterly unable to comprehend', one reviewer complained, before drafting this 'angle of femoral contortion'; *The Athenaeum* 79 (1829), 270b.

And so at last to the *Symphonie pastorale*: by conjoining the increasingly immaterial female forms of the ballet-pantomime and the spiritualised landscape of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*, Bochsa brought the prevailing trends into finer focus. The emerging ideal of the sylph-like ballerina in the late 1820s was rapidly falling in line with Beethoven's statement, quoted on the handbill of the symphony's first performance in Vienna (22 December 1808), that the work was 'mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei' (more the expression of feeling than painting). On stage, *danseuses* were increasingly turned into magical beings, their abstract movements tending more towards 'feeling' than materiality. 'The French *artistes*, and Italian *figurants* resemble aërial beings, rather than bone and blood', Horace Foote wrote in 1829, 'for flesh may almost be left out of their composition'.<sup>76</sup> Like the elusive scenes of Beethoven's musical landscape, the emerging 'aërial being' was not a fleshly object to be painted, but a memory to be recalled (an *Erinnerung*). Her spiritualised body was analogous to what listener-viewers perceived in Beethoven's musical description of the feelings of country life. She was a figure who did not

was a particular target in 1829. Ayrton attacked her début in *Masaniello*: 'Mademoiselle Vaque-Moulin appeared for the first time in London, and did every thing as a *danseuse* that good taste rejects and nature abhors. But she was much applauded, and most of the papers praise her. Our only wonder is – and we are not over nice – how modest women can sit and witness an exhibition, which were it to take place in a public house or in the street, would inevitably, and very justly, give the perpetrator a month's dance on the tread-mill'; see *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>76</sup> Foote, *A Companion to the Theatres; and Manual of the British Drama*, 115.



literally embody or describe Nature. Rather, she constituted an immaterial, concert-like interpretation of it.

By borrowing his score wholesale from the Pastoral, Bochsa responded not only to an emerging popularity but also to an unrivalled programmatic clarity. Ballet d'action scores had always demanded both a sense of aural familiarity and visual distinctiveness; composers had gone to great lengths to depict the dancer's actions, the general mood, and objects on stage. The decline of mimic sign-language exaggerated this: tone-painting was becoming crucial to the sense of location and to the listener-viewer's interpretation of the scene. Airs parlantes imitated the ballerina's silent speech (a role perhaps played in the 1829 production by the violin figurations of Beethoven's 'Szene am Bach'), diegetic dancing was frequently interpolated for its straightforward realism (as in the third movement trio, 'Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute') and it became fundamental that a shocking penultimate-act event (such as the fourth movement, 'Gewitter. Sturm') was resolved in the finale. Ballet music, in other words, increasingly aspired to the kinds of descriptive competence and musical familiarity that were coming to be acquired by the Pastoral in the concert hall.

### Symphonic impersonation

I learn from hearsay that the performance was worthy of the individual which caused it, and was attended by many of the most profligate persons in this town, where there is a greater mixture of virtue and vice than in any city of Europe.

The Harmonicon, June 1829<sup>77</sup>

Such a display of side dishes had never before been exhibited before the musical world. Listen ye who have been idle or on a low diet, and excluded from this banquet.

The Athenaeum, June 1829<sup>78</sup>

Bochsa's performance occurred at the height of a rush of benefits late in June during the climax of London's musical season. Both the winter patent theatres, the Drury Lane and Covent Garden, would close within a few weeks once high society had retreated to country houses for the summer. The 'Musical Scramble' of June 1829, as the Spectator put it early in July, was intense enough to involve at least fifteen benefits in major patent theatre and concert venues in the eleven days prior to

<sup>77</sup> The Harmonicon 8 (1829), 122.

<sup>78</sup> The Athenaeum 87, 'Mr Bochsa's Concert' (24 June 1829), 396.

Bochsa's concert.<sup>79</sup> Produced by the celebrity director of the largest and most prestigious opera company in Europe after La Scala, in certainly the most active musical centre on earth for sheer volume and variety of musical entertainment, Bochsa's dramatic concert marked the peak of London's 'scramble'.<sup>80</sup> 'None of the phenomena of the season have worn so imposing an aspect', the Athenaeum observed, 'as the placards studded with every type of character of print, prospective of Mr Bochsa's concert. Everywhere was the eye greeted with the same promise of good things to come; and the gourmand might be seen loitering at the shop windows to feast himself upon the Bill of Fare'. The Times marvelled too at 'a bill of at least three yards length, full of big names and large letters'. On the night in question, the Courier and Athenaeum reported the auditorium full, the pit and the boxes abnormally packed, and the house showing a particularly 'animated appearance'.<sup>81</sup>

A printed programme for the concert survives in The British Library.<sup>82</sup> As the Athenaeum suggested, it read like a gargantuan Victorian meal.<sup>83</sup> Continuing the trend of twinning the compositions, Handel's Acis and Galatea, 'with appropriate scenery, dresses and decorations' opened the proceedings; the Symphonie pastorale,

<sup>79</sup> The Spectator 56 (5 July 1829). The Harmonicon of 1829 lists twenty-four benefits between 8 May and 24 June. The compiler omits all those events that did not take place either at private venues, the Argyll Rooms, the King's Concert Rooms or Hanover Square. Drury Lane, Covent Garden and the King's Theatre's main stage (excluding the myriad of minor theatres) hosted another twelve benefits at least between 9 and 22 June. Evidence for a minimum of fifteen benefits survives either in the local press advertisements or in handbill collections for the eleven days (excluding Sundays) before Bochsa's concert. Fétis' report on London's music scene estimated 80 benefits in May and June of 1829; see Carse, The Orchestra from Beethoven to Berlioz, 227.

<sup>80</sup> 'Once a year, Bochsa gave in London a Benefit Concert on a scale of great splendour; and possessing great influence over every eminent artist, both vocal and instrumental, at the time in the metropolis', in Henry C. Watson, 'N. C. Bochsa, the Eminent Composer, Harpist, and Pianist', George G. Foster, ed., Biography of Anna Bishop the Celebrated Cantatrice followed by a Sketch of Bochsa's Life (Sydney, 1855), 11–4, particularly 13. By 1839, according to George Foster (possibly Bochsa himself), the musician's annual benefit concert warranted the presence of the newly crowned Queen Victoria. 'Never in the world', Foster recalled of the 1839 concert, 'had there been such a concentration of talent'.

<sup>81</sup> See The Courier (23 June 1829) and The Athenaeum 87 (24 June 1829), 396.

<sup>82</sup> The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 42,896/233–59b. The programme was catalogued among the scripts submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office and the Examiner of Plays. It was deposited in June 1829 for licensing under the provision of Acts regulating performances on the London stage.

<sup>83</sup> An advertisement nearly three weeks before the concert in The Morning Chronicle (3 June 1829), leads the writer of the 'Mirror of Fashion' in the same issue to note that 'the bill of fare for this evening contains great variety combined with great excellence'. Ehrlich also describes the Philharmonic Society concerts programmes in the 1820s in terms of 'gargantuan Victorian meals'; Ehrlich, First Philharmonic, 49. The comparison between music and food was frequent at the time, and it is significant that England should be deemed *le pays sans cuisine* at the same time as being *Das Land ohne Musik*. Bohrer, billed in 28 May 1829 in The Morning Chronicle as 'first violincello to the King of France, and of the concerts of her Royal Highness Madame, Duchess de Berri', would later establish the Bohrer Quartet (1830–1) with Chrétien Urhan in Paris, which brought Beethoven's late string quartets to the French public.

as was conventional for ballet, closed them. A harp concertino by Bochsa, 'Erin's Bardic Effusions', based on 'various popular Irish Melodies, and a subject from Carolan's Concerto', came second. 'Part Two' mixed the death scene from Niccolò Zingarelli's *Romeo e Giulietta* with a set of cello variations by Max Bohrer and the execution scene, 'for the first time in this country', from Rossini's *Ciro in Babilonia*. 'Part Three' opened with 'the principal scenes of Act II' from *Der Freischütz*, highlights from the 'Inno di Morte' of Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto*, and a 'new trio' for harp, violin and flute played by Bochsa, the aging 'young Orpheus' Nicolas Mori, and the flutist and chair of the Paris Conservatoire, Jean-Louis Tulou. Six scenes from Spontini's tragédie lyrique *La Vestale* prepared the stomach for 'Part Four's' long-awaited ballet.

**PART V.**  
—  
**SYMPHONIE PASTORALE**  
DE  
**BEETHOVEN.**

*Mise en Scène par M. DESHAYES.*

RÔLES.	Acteurs.
<i>Lucas</i> - - - - -	M. COULON.
<i>Le Seigneur</i> - - - - -	M. GOSSELIN.
<i>Mathurin</i> - - - - -	M. SIMON.
<i>Alien</i> - - - - -	M. GOURIET.
<i>Louise</i> - - - - -	M <sup>lle</sup> VAQUE MOULIN.

Jeunes Filles.  
Villageois.  
Villageoises.  
Pâtres.  
Enfants.  
Laquais.

—  
**DANSE.**

M.M.	Mesdames.
COULON.	P. LEROUX.
FREDERIC.	PEAN.
GEORGE.	RINALDI.
D'ALBERT.	PEREZ.

M<sup>lle</sup> VAQUE MOULIN.

♫c. ♫c. ♫c.

Plate 10. *Symphonie pastorale* libretto, title page; by permission of The British Library, 'Lord Chamberlain's Plays', Manuscripts Add. 42,896/257.

A break-down of the *Symphonie pastorale*'s action, copied into the programme in French, helped viewer-listeners interpret the scenes. The title page of the libretto lists four chief actors, a principal actress (Élisa Vaque-Moulin), young girls, villagers of both sexes, shepherds, 'lackeys' or stable-boys, and four pairs of *danseurs* and *danseuses*. The *mise en scène*, just beneath Beethoven's name, was by the newly appointed Deshayes, the 'drama produced under his immediate direction'.<sup>84</sup> The ballet master probably contributed the symphony's story, which appeared a page after his credit in the programme.

Briefly summarised, the libretto tells the story of Louise, Lucas and Louise's over-protective father, Mathurin. The first movement (Bochsa would have known it as 'Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande', 'Awakening of happy feelings on arrival in the countryside')<sup>85</sup> opens on a pastoral scene, Mathurin's house probably in the foreground. Villagers arrive from all sides to collect their working tools and summon Mathurin to the harvest. Louise is left alone with a group of young girls who try to entice her out into the countryside, and a group of boys led by the amorous Lucas who want the same. Mathurin returns just in time to interfere; a struggle ensues during which the lovers secretly agree to rendezvous in a nearby grove. Beethoven's second movement ('Szene am Bach') shifts the action to this clandestine destination and the third scene of the drama, where Lucas and a reluctantly disobedient Louise eventually declare their love amongst sparkling water-features and Beethoven's nightingale, quail and cuckoo.

The third movement corresponds to the fourth scene of the play and the return of the girls to warn Louise that her father is looking for her. The lovers separate and the scene shifts back (during the movement and in front of the audience) to Mathurin's home for the final scene. The villagers return from their work in the fields. A group of shepherds dance the scherzo's rustic Trio while Louise steals home and the stage gradually empties. The sky darkens for the storm. There is thunder and lightning. The villagers cross the stage 'de tout part' trying to save themselves. The house is struck by lightning (bar 78?), Louise is engulfed by fire,

<sup>84</sup> *The Times* (22 June 1829).

<sup>85</sup> According to Del Mar, the first orchestral sets, published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1809, altered the movement titles in all of the manuscript sources, the 'authentic' title for the first movement being 'Angenehme, heitere Empfindungen', 'welche bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande im Menschen erwachen'; see Beethoven, *Symphonie Nr. 6 in F-dur. Symphony No. 6 in F major 'Pastorale' op. 68*, ed. Jonathan Del Mar (Basel, 2001), viii.

and, 'sur le point d'être la victime des flammes' (bars 103-7?), is saved by the brave Lucas.<sup>86</sup>

The calming action of the 'rainbow' motif (bars 146-153) leads to Beethoven's fifth movement ('Frohe und dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm'). A new figure, Alien [!], appears onstage and calls back the villagers, extraordinarily, with a type of upright serpent, developed from the so-called 'English' bass-horn, patented by Louis Alexandre Frichot of Paris in 1810 and called the 'trombe' or basse-trompette. Beethoven's clarinet and horn calls (bars 1-9) thus accounted for, the villagers return and announce the coming of the benevolent Seigneur, who, after witnessing the now homeless Mathurin concede his daughter to Lucas, predictably condescends to repair the storm damage. Dancing and general joy close the action.

At least eight newspapers or journals reviewed the occasion. Judging by the number of items dealing with a dramatic realization of The Marriage of Figaro (preceded by Lodgings for Single Gentlemen) at the Theatre Royal Haymarket, many members of the press did not get pit tickets for the King's Theatre and had to settle for the offerings at a minor theatre on the same street. Of the six journalists who did gain entry, two reviewed the dramatic concert enthusiastically, two thought it 'tolerable', and two expressed indignation, particularly at the Symphonie pastorale.<sup>87</sup>

The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review (probably Richard Mackenzie Bacon) remembered the event as the 'one distinguished exception [in the series of 1829 benefit concerts] which display[ed] a very singular instance of imaginative power'.<sup>88</sup> The Courier and Morning Post agreed: 'the performances exhibited great variety, evinced much industry, and in their execution an unusual force of vocal excellence was exerted'. The London Literary Gazette writer probably left the concert after Part Two, applauding Zuchelli (or Joe Kelly) for his performance of Polyphemus in Acis and Galatea, and making special mention of Maria Malibran (Romeo) and Henriette Sontag (Giulietta) in Romeo e Giulietta.<sup>89</sup> After the curtain

<sup>86</sup> It is likely, at this point of tension, that frozen scenes were displayed to register fully the prevailing sentiment of the moment.

<sup>87</sup> See The Morning Post (23 June 1829) reprinted in The Courier (23 June 1829), The Times (24 June 1829) reprinted in Evening Mail (24 June 1829), The Athenaeum 87 (24 June 1829), The London Literary Gazette and Journal (27 June 1829), The Court Journal 1/9 (1829), and The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 10/39 (1829).

<sup>88</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 10 (1828-30), 303.

<sup>89</sup> Five years previously, Henriette Sontag had sung in the premieres of the Ninth and the Missa Solemnis on 7 and 13 May 1824 at the Kärntnertheater. She sung here with the legendary Spanish mezzo, Maria Malibran. These singers had busy schedules in 1829. Immediately after the duet, Sontag



fell, the London Literary Gazette recalled, the tragic pair found themselves on the audience side of the proscenium, an eventuality that obliged the stage hands to enter and remove their bodies (demonstrating the level of audience participation in the 'realism' of stage action in the era before curtain calls).<sup>90</sup> The Athenaeum (probably Henry Chorley) confessed to being fatigued by the time the concert was drawing to a close: 'Sometime about half way through the following instrumental duet [Bochsa's 'new trio' without Mori], we fell into a trance, from which neither Spontini nor Beethoven could awaken us. We got home by daylight'. Ignaz Moscheles, who had attended the public premiere of Beethoven's Sixth in Vienna, also retired early, noting in his diary that Bochsa's benefit was 'one of the choicest entertainments this season', but that 'the finale, that German trifle the 'Pastoral Symphony' [was] missed, for an overdose of music is not good for the health'.<sup>91</sup>

The Court Journal and Times (probably Thomas Alsager) were both less enthusiastic. 'We decidedly object', the Court Journal wrote, 'to the incredible jumble of incoherent matter which Mr Bochsa presented to his friends on Monday night, and would, above all, set our faces against the worse than vain and foolish, the almost sacrilegious attempt to dramatize the Acis and Galatea of Haydn [sic], and to dance to the Pastoral Symphony of Beethoven!'<sup>92</sup> The writer for the Times agreed. After lambasting the 'mass of crude and indigestible stuff' which preceded the finale, he wrote:

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and Malibran left to perform at a party given by Prince Leopold's in the Grand Hall of Marlborough House just down Pall Mall. They had to be there at 10pm; see The Courier 11,731 (24 June 1829), 3c.

<sup>90</sup> This caused such a sensation that when Romeo e Giulietta was repeated five days later on 27 June 1829, one newspaper reported: 'At the conclusion, the curtain fell behind the exanimated pair, and this being the second time that the like catastrophe has occurred, we must necessarily conclude that it was a pre-conceived coup de théâtre. The lovers had not lain long before they were carried off by the stage attendants; the situation certainly was not without its effect, yet we much doubt the propriety of a contrivance which has in some measure the appearance of trickery, more especially as nothing was needed to add to the splendid effect produced by the previous acting'; The Standard (29 June 1829).

<sup>91</sup> Cited from a diary entry of 22 June 1829, in Moscheles, Life of Moscheles, 230.

<sup>92</sup> The temerity of a dramatic version of Acis and Galatea would seem less pronounced than a staged Beethoven symphony, since stagings of the oratorio were almost as old as the composition itself. The Daily Courant of 5 June 1732 advertised a performance in the old King's Theatre without action but with scenes in 'a Picturesque Manner, a Rural Prospect, with Rocks, Groves, Fountains and Grotto's [sic], amongst which will be disposed a Chorus of Nymphs and Shepherds, the Habils and every other Decoration suited to the Subject'; see David Nalbach, The King's Theatre. 1704-1867. London's First Italian Opera House (London, 1992), 145. See also an earlier 1731 version in Brian Trowell, 'Acis, Galatea and Polyphemus, a Serenata a Tre Voci?', in Nigel Fortune, ed., Music and Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean (Cambridge, 1982), 40. That the oratorio was acquiring 'work-status' in 1829 in a manner similar to Beethoven's symphonies is confirmed by the sensibilities The Court Journal writer attached to it.

We think it necessary to raise our voices against one particular act of profanation resorted to on this occasion. Until now, the Pastoral Symphony of Beethoven was looked upon by all musical men as a composition as complete, that nothing beyond perfect instrumental execution could possibly add to the effect of its performance. Mr Bochsa has, however, assigned on this occasion the whole of that magnificent symphony to some of the figurants of the ballet!

### Unlawful endings

Through Beethoven, instrumental music has gained just as real a basis in nature as dramatic music has in history. If earlier it was only the expression of a purely inner emotional state, an act of completely subjective feeling, it has now been raised to the representation of a completely objective perception.

Adolph Bernhard Marx, 1826<sup>93</sup>

The critical backlash against Bochsa's Symphonie represented a strand of opinion that would, of course, eventually win over musical thought and project the harpist and his danced aberration into the 'unlawful' recesses of history. Nonetheless, both Marx's notion that Beethoven had raised music from subjective feeling to objective perception and the contradictory set of reviews remind us that such opinions, whenever they are expressed, are always partisan and contested. Resistance in the press notwithstanding, evidence on the ground indicates that a general concert-ballet intimacy came vividly into focus around the time of Bochsa's Pastorale. The sensual pull of materialisation, performance, and the danseuse for once overcame the long-term musical puritanism of the arbiters of taste, as ballet and concert shifted into view of one another.

At once associated with spiritual forms and physical objects, instrumental music resisted the lure of autonomy and became more like its dancing partner, sharing her plastic, visual and word-narrative properties. She, meanwhile, combined the coded securities of mime with an emerging decorative fantasy, and smoothed over her once precise and angular features in the newly feminised and pastoral forms of ballet-pantomime. Both dance and concert became simultaneously abstracted ideals (particularly in terms of compositional qualities and critical reception) and narrative-pictorial forms (particularly in terms of performance and listening).

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<sup>93</sup> Adolph Bernhard Marx, 'Open Essays: On the Relationship of Form to Content in Recent Music', Wayne M. Senner, ed., The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by his German Contemporaries (Lincoln, 1999), 92.

As if to confirm this coming-together and seal the significance of the evening of 22 June 1829, the Sixth Symphony was danced on at least two other occasions in the years immediately following Bochsa's benefit. Berlioz reported attending a choreographed rendition of the first movement at Lyon's Grand-Théâtre on 2 November 1832, while on 6 July 1835 the Morning Chronicle advertised a 'NEW MIMIC DIVERTISEMENT [sic]' at Drury Lane, 'in which an attempt has been made to dramatise [as a ballet] the whole of Beethoven's celebrated Pastoral Sinfonia'.<sup>94</sup> The spate of staged Sixth Symphonies in more or less unrelated contexts immediately after 1829 underlined not only the growing popularity of Beethoven's tone-painting, but also the general spread of a strongly felt ballet-concert exchange.

For modern taste, perhaps the most foreign aspect of this Europe-wide development, and hence the most likely reason for the virtual disappearance of these trends and performances from the historical map, is the idea that the emerging concept of the work embodied an objective shape.<sup>95</sup> While the strange corporeality of music owed something to the lingering centrality of coded eighteenth-century musical topics, it owed more to an emerging relationship between orchestral forms and dance. Ballet-concert intimacy meant that the work-concept took on a freshly pastoral or exotic shape: an image vague at first, but very soon precise and plastic. This is where the significance of the story of Mathurin, Lucas, and Louise lies: it provides us with a uniquely graphic picture of how an epoch-defining symphony came to be publicly imagined in the late 1820s and 30s. At the threshold of the invention of the modern musical canon, the work most characteristic of its era embodied a strange, finely etched physiognomy – a shape indicative of a not-so-subjective type of imaginative listening. The admittedly extreme but fully representative form of Bochsa's now dimly remembered Symphonie pastorale marks the point at which this objective figuring appeared most vividly.

In the end, the strange repercussions of the ballet-concert reached deep into the nineteenth century, even as the Pastoral and its presumed literalism became less popular. Dance had mediated the entire emergence of the Beethoven-canon: witness

<sup>94</sup> Hector Berlioz, Correspondance générale, ed. Pierre Citron, 8 vols (Paris, 1975), II, 32–3. See also The Morning Chronicle (6 July 1835).

<sup>95</sup> If anything, there are signs that the pendulum may be swinging back. In recent years, such 'pure' music as Schubert's Winterreise and Bach cantatas have been staged, although modern visualisations are posited more as figural metaphors than objective realizations.

Wagner's oft-cited but hitherto misunderstood 1849 description of the Seventh Symphony:

This symphony is the Apotheosis of Dance herself: it is Dance in her highest aspect, as it were the loftiest Deed of bodily motion incorporated in an ideal mould of tone. Melody and Harmony unite around the sturdy bones of Rhythm to firm and fleshy human shapes, which now with giant limbs' agility, and now with soft, elastic pliance, almost before our very eyes, close up the supple, teeming ranks; the while now gently, now with daring, now serious, now wanton, now pensive, and again exulting, the deathless strain sounds forth and forth; until, in the last whirl of delight, a kiss of triumph seals the last embrace.<sup>96</sup>

Wagner's views on dance here and elsewhere can be radically reread in the new light of the early nineteenth-century ballet-concert and Deshayes' forgotten story of pastoral love. The re-imagined Beethoven of Wagner's writings, the invention of his own musical genealogy and the developing narrative behind his *Artwork of the Future*, all hinged on a curiously sentimental, hitherto baffling fascination with dance and the typical storylines of 'her' unfolding.

While certainly exceptional, the extraordinary fact of an 'unlawful' impersonation of a Beethoven symphony as a ballet-pantomime at the benefit of a convicted forger is in no way inexplicable or insignificant. Because later history and criticism turned away from the trends it represented, we are left only with traces and scattered evidence of a corporeal way of experiencing instrumental music, so very different from our own. The difficulty of suppressing our careless amusement by critically rethinking the remote past indicates the small measure to which we have access to the world that past represents. The early nineteenth-century auditorium, the scene of a strongly felt ballet-concert rapprochement in the late 1820s, was an entirely different space from the dark, non-figurative modern concert hall which reshaped our music-historical imagination in the twentieth century. Today, Wagner's account of the modern canon setting out in history can be taken seriously once more: 'From the shore of Dance', the younger composer recalled, '[Beethoven] cast himself upon that endless sea'.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Richard Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln, 1993), 124–5.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

## Melodramatic Possessions: South Africa, *The Flying Dutchman* and the Imperial Stage

And thus, the imperial period of our history starts. Great empires usually are not formed intentionally. From Russia to Rome, dangers at their borders compelled them to take the next bit of land. And so on they continued, until they collapsed.

While we [America] will not plant our flag on foreign lands, nor claim them for ourselves, we will insist on intruding and searching and managing. To do less would be criminal negligence on the part of our leaders. But in doing it we will be cursed, like the Flying Dutchman of legend, to wander the globe until the day of judgement.

Tony Blankley (11 September 2002)<sup>1</sup>

### 'The date on that picture'

Tension grips the second scene of *The Flying Dutchman; or, the Phantom Ship*, a colonial melodrama by Edward Ball a.k.a. 'The Terrible Fitzball'. Packed into London's Adelphi Theatre on a cool night in late October 1829, the dandies in the boxes, the youths and cyprians in the stalls and gallery, shift nervously in their seats. Thunder is heard as the stage darkens. Locked in a fortress on the southern tip of Africa by her tyrannous guardian and expecting a forced marriage, Lestelle awaits abduction by the Dutch bride-seeking man-monster, Vanderdecken. Premonitions of her awful fate appearing about her, she is shown the location of her future incarceration. Lucy, her anxious attendant, gestures to a wall-painting dated '1729':

Lucy. ... [*Thunder again heard, and the stage becoming darker and darker*]  
... Just look at the date on that picture, ma'am.

Les. [*Turns up stage, close on L. side, looking at the ship in scene*] Well, what of it?

Lucy. (R.) That's one hundred years ago – you remember the story, ma'am – once in a hundred years. [*Lucy pointing to the picture of the*

<sup>1</sup> Tony Blankley, 'The Imperial Era Begins', *The Washington Times*, 11 September 2002, 11. The conservative newspaper's editorial commemorated the first anniversary of the World Trade Centre attacks.



*ship*] That, you know, is called Vanderdecken's ship: [*Thunder*] if the old Dutchman be not taking his rounds to-night, I'm much mistaken. Don't stand so far off, if you please, ma'am; [*Lestelle crosses to Lucy*] I think I see the ghost of that Flying Dutchman in every ray of the moonlight. [*Stage quite dark*]

Duet – Lestelle and Lucy.

Les. [*sings*] Tis the hour when spirits wander, Wander lonely through the night.<sup>2</sup>

Literally momentous: this recognition of one's moment, this presentiment of a doom-laden date, heightens the sense of being trapped in a confluence of time and space; there is a driving-onwards towards an increasingly dark, ill-formed world. Words fail, as music (George Rodwell's) swells ominously.<sup>3</sup> Inscribed onto the picture, this sign – '1729' – both for actor and audience, focuses attention inward – onto the here and now. Everything points to the events unfolding around them. Set into the story, this date, marking the very year of its performance, is ill-fated.

### Stories at sea

The tale of the ghostly mariner cursed to wander the seas until Doomsday had been popular before 1829. Premiering at the Adelphi Theatre on 6 December 1826, Fitzball's play had enjoyed an immense seventeen-week run, closing on the same night (7 April 1827) that Heinrich Heine probably sat in the auditorium. (It is likely that Fitzball's account influenced Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, since the composer took the story from Heine.<sup>4</sup> This derivation is not entirely shameful since, in the words of Walter Scott, Fitzball represented 'a mighty luminary which reflected its lustre upon the so-called illegitimate drama'.<sup>5</sup>) Apart from a twelve-night Adelphi revival later that year, the melodrama surfaced at the Coburg Theatre, Sadler's Wells and travelled as far as Brighton, Worthing, Norwich, Dublin and Newcastle-upon

<sup>2</sup> Edward Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', *Cumberland's Minor Theatre II* (London, 1829), 15. The censored manuscript can be found in *Lord Chamberlain's Plays* 18, The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 42,881, ff. 25–128.

<sup>3</sup> George Herbert Rodwell, while still in his 20s, was appointed professor of harmony and composition at the Royal Academy of Music in 1828. He had made his name at the Adelphi Theatre, having been employed by his brother, who was proprietor during the 1824–5 season.

<sup>4</sup> William Ashton Ellis, 'From Fitzball to Wagner. A Flying Dutchman Fallacy', *The Meister* 5 (1892), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge, 2000), 37.

Tyne.<sup>6</sup> But in 1829, a century on since Vanderdecken's last visitation, a watershed to this rising tide of Dutchman stories loomed.

Two weeks before another Adelphi revival was due, Robert Elliston, proprietor of the Surrey Theatre on the South Bank, acquired a copy of Fitzball's script, probably via a professional shorthand theatre plagiarist. Still bankrupt after his failure as Drury Lane manager, Elliston took out a lease on the Surrey in the name of his son. He hoped to cash in on the growing highbrow taste for music and well-known stories. More invidiously, he wanted to raise the Surrey above the Adelphi in London's theatrical pecking order.<sup>7</sup> So when his Dutchman piracy opened on 28 September 1829 to the signature tune of the French Revolution – Johann Vogel's overture to Démophon (1789) (a piece never respected in terms of 'musical property') – the battle-lines were drawn.<sup>8</sup> The stage was set for a theatre war.

Elliston refused blame for his breach of copyright. He claimed that the manuscript had come to his door legally via the earliest Vanderdecken, the great Thomas Potter Cooke. The original monster-menace, Cooke had played the first melodramatic Frankenstein and vampire both in Paris and London. He had also made a chilling Samiel in one of the many English incarnations of Weber's opera, Der Freischütz.<sup>9</sup> Not only starring as Vanderdecken in the Dutchman, he presided over what the playbills described as the piece's 'melodramatic business'. His impressive physique and agility already celebrated by the 1820s, such a designation was groundbreaking: one of the earliest deployments of a stage director in London. Cooke, in other words, overhauled a system in which 'the prompter' directed

<sup>6</sup> See Robert Elliston's preface, Anon: William Moncrieff, 'The Flying Dutchman; or the Spectral Ship', Richardson's New Minor Drama III (London, 1828), xi.

<sup>7</sup> By late September 1829, Robert Elliston, proprietor of the Surrey, had obtained a copy of the Dutchman's promptscript, possibly via a short-hand copyist. A certain 'Mr Kenneth, at the corner of Bow-street' may have been the supplier, since, according to playwright Douglas Jerrold, he ran an on-demand business for scribbling out libretti as they were acted: 'supply[ing] any gentleman with any manuscript on the lowest terms'; see Douglas Jerrold's testimony before the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature in 1832, British Parliamentary Papers: Report from the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Laws affecting Dramatic Literature 7 (London: House of Commons, 1832), 157. Elliston made extensive use of such hacks, having retaken a seven-year lease on the Surrey on 4 June 1827. Having failed as Drury Lane manager a year earlier, the proprietor was in no mood for untested melodramas.

<sup>8</sup> Démophon's overture, which premiered at the Paris Opéra in 1789, became a signature tune for the Revolution. It retained much of its popularity on the back of its incorporation into Gardel's ballet-pantomime Psyché (1790), which had its final revival at the Opéra in 1829; see Marian Smith, Opera and Ballet in the Age of Giselle (Princeton, 2000), 98, 104.

<sup>9</sup> Cooke acted the first vampire at the English Opera House (9 August 1820), having been in Le Vampire (13 June 1820) at the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin; see Roxana Stuart, 'The Vampire in Nineteenth-century Melodrama', James Redmond, ed., Themes in Drama 14: Desire and the Limits of Melodrama (Cambridge, 1993), 223–44.

morning rehearsals: noting exits and entrances, leaving questions of personal delivery aside. The Dutchman required more from players than intoning lines directly to the audience sixty to eighty percent of the time as Michael Harvey has speculated was normal.<sup>10</sup> A master of pantomime, Cooke centralised theatrical control, co-ordinated his actors to interact in tight relational situations, and made important innovations. Melodrama broke new ground, for example, when he unveiled the first theatrical phantasmagoria, an early type of optical illusion, to project Vanderdecken's spectral ship against the Act One backcloth.<sup>11</sup>



R. Cruikshank, Del.

Bonner, Sc.

### The Flying Dutchman.

The Crew. Ah! Vanderdecken! Vanderdecken!

Plate 11. Robert Cruikshank's frontispiece showing the phantasmagoria of the ship, in Edward Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', Cumberland's Minor Theatre II (London, 1829). 'The Adelphi delights in those terrible convulsions', one reviewer commented, 'in which the machinist and the fire-worker play the principal parts; and, considering the limited field of action, can produce horrors on a small scale with astonishing exactitude and attention to the marvellous'; see The Atlas IV/144 (12 February 1829), 106b.

<sup>10</sup> See Elaine Hadley, Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace 1800–1885 (Stanford, 1995), 68.

<sup>11</sup> Developing the pioneering feats of the Belgian optician, Etienne-Gaspard Robert, Paul de Philipsthal (a Frenchman) introduced the phantasmagoria to London at the Lyceum in 1803; see Anon, Phantasmagoria, or the Development of Magical Deception (London, 1803).

During this finale, the Dutchman (Vanderdecken) – a mute figure in the mould of the classic melodramatic villain – is mysteriously plucked from the sea by English sailors just out of sight of Table Mountain. Dragged on board, he throws himself into action, seizing a letter offering the shady Dutch lawyer, Peter von Bummel, Lestelle's hand in marriage. Peter and three sailors attempt to retrieve it:

MUSIC. – Peter attempts to snatch the letter, when it explodes – a sailor is about to seize Vanderdecken, who eludes his grasp, and vanishes through the deck – Tom Willis fires on R., Von Swiggs on L. – a Sailor falls dead on the deck – Vanderdecken, with a demoniac laugh, rises from the sea in blue fire, amidst violent thunder – at that instant Ship appears in the sky behind – Vanderdecken [!] and the crew in consternation exclaim. 'Ah! Vanderdecken! Vanderdecken!' as the drop hastily falls.<sup>12</sup>

Such dénouements were Cooke's stock-in-trade. 'His acting of Vanderdecken', Fitzball recalled, 'had in it the sublimity of awful mystery' – he was the envy of the theatres.<sup>13</sup> No wonder, then, that a day after the south-side Surrey opened with Cooke as Vanderdecken, the managers of the Adelphi tried to prevent his reappearance. The West End theatre, after all, had secured his services in the same role only twenty days later. Because the Adelphi held a winter licence, many of its actors – including Cooke – had taken jobs at the lowerbrow Surrey over the summer. Therefore: as soon as the Adelphi managers heard about the rival Dutchman, they announced that they were opening their season early, with Cooke as their leading man. This attempt to block the Surrey version put the actor-director in a tight situation. Having failed to find a way to 'run turns' (play both theatres on one night), Cooke called off his engagement with the more upmarket theatre. Given his reputation, this startling move threatened the Adelphi's traditional pre-eminence. And on 7 October, the managers hit back angrily across the Thames by having a legal injunction passed against Elliston's piracy.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', 19. In a review of the first production, one newspaper noted: 'the effect produced by their Flying Dutchman is extremely good; it is an optical delusion, well-managed, and new to the stage'; see John Bull 6/313, 10 December 1826, 398. According to the playbills, Mr Dolland, 'Optician to His Majesty' managed the illusion. This tableau anticipated the finale of Wagner's opera, when die verklärten Gestalten of the Holländer and his bride soar upward in a red blaze.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Fitzball, Thirty-Five Years of Dramatic Author's Life, 2 vols (London, 1859), I, 170. A review appearing in the Morning Chronicle, having commented on the 'pleasing' overture and music, describes Cooke 'stalking and looking most spectre-like'; see The Morning Chronicle (5 December 1826), 3a.

<sup>14</sup> My account is based on notices in The British Library's Surrey Theatre playbills (Playbills312); Elliston's defence of his actions in Moncrieff, 'The Flying Dutchman; or the Spectral Ship', v–xiv; and

Threatened with the law and forced to abandon his chef d'oeuvre, Elliston moved quickly. Until this dispute, convention held that published melodramas – the Dutchman had been printed early in 1829 – were free to be acted as 'stock pieces' at any theatre. Aware of this, Elliston travelled to Brighton to check the validity of the injunction passed against him at the office of the Master of the Rolls (Sir John Leach). He and his solicitors found that the Adelphi did in fact own full rights, but that a clerical error had occurred in application. The mistake pointed out, a second, more scrupulous, submission was required of publisher John Cumberland and the proprietors of the Adelphi (Yates and Mathews). This bought Elliston time to plan countermeasures. Not used to backing down, he commissioned local hack, William Moncrieff, and one-time pupil of Haydn, Jonathan Blewitt, to prepare a 'new' piece entitled The Flying Dutchman; or, the Spectral Ship. Side-stepping the copyright issue, this concoction took the stage a full three days before the Adelphi Dutchman could match it (Richard John 'Obi' Smith stood in for Cooke at the Adelphi as Vanderdecken). The Courier reported of the later West End opening: 'From the legal proceedings which have recently been adopted by the Managers of this theatre, to restrain the Director of a similar establishment from representing this piece, the work itself has been forced before the public in a more conspicuous manner than it ever could have arrived at from its intrinsic merits'.<sup>15</sup> The diligence of both companies notwithstanding, the matter would be settled in a bizarre turn of events the following week. Concurrent Surrey and Adelphi versions having pitted 'Obi' against Cooke for only a few days, Elliston received word that Fitzball had sold a second copyright to an obscure publisher two years previously.<sup>16</sup> (Throughout the affair, Fitzball had been unavailable, since he was on the continent in 1829.) Once Elliston had acquired these duplicate rights, he was free to stage both the Phantom Ship and his own Spectral Ship. More than this: to make sure everyone was clear about his entitlement to both versions – rubbing salt in the Adelphi's wound – he decided to alternate the productions night by night.<sup>17</sup>

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unidentified newspaper cuttings in the Enthoven Collection (Theatre Museum, London, the Adelphi 1829 file). See also Richard John Smith, 'Autobiographical Sketches', Wendy C. Henderson and William W. Appleton, ed., Performing Arts Resources (New York, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> See the running commentary on the dispute in The Courier (17 October 1829), 3e; (20 October 1829), 3e and Elliston's letter to the paper: (24 October 1829), 3e.

<sup>16</sup> This may have been needed by 'Mrs Jamieson' for Anon, The Flying Dutchman; or The Demon Ship (London, ca. 1830).

<sup>17</sup> The affair is complicated. In 1826 and 1827, the Adelphi paid Fitzball one guinea per night for permission to perform his Dutchman (a sum which over time had amounted to £87, 3s). On the 11



Why are these details important? This cluster of dates and competing melodramas brought pressure to the days between 27 October and 7 November. Despite the Adelphi's best efforts, three accounts of the same legend played chaotically over each other. Changing the face of melodrama, as we shall see, the Surrey-Adelphi scrap brought the Dutchman story unprecedented notoriety. These were moments partaking of the 'grand, the wild and the terrible', as Elliston described his Spectral Ship.<sup>18</sup> The copyright dispute not only spawned a new approach to rehearsal and production. The struggle over property added its bluster to a Parliamentary Committee Report on copyright law and dramatic authors, called in 1832. The Adelphi's replacement Vanderdecken, moreover, was a success: whereas Cooke's muteness had dominated 1820s horror, so the deep, sepulchral voice of the tall, gaunt figure of 'Obi' Smith dominated the 30s. The shifts played out in a local legal scrap steered wider cultural trends on nothing less than an epoch-defining scale.<sup>19</sup> The Dutchman's atmosphere of extremity and turbulence stirred into the cultural moment; every small theatrical event – every chronological detail – carried significance. On 24 November 1829, the curtain of the Surrey Theatre fell on the last Vanderdecken of its era, the Adelphi having thrown in the towel seventeen days earlier. The story of the ghostly captain and his crew – with its menacing plot, thick atmosphere and nightmarish gloom – finally turned in on itself.

In what follows, I want to relate this end-moment – the intrigue, commotion and silence – to an unfolding image of South Africa. With its dim lighting and flashing allusions, the Dutchman took place mostly at sea – off the coast. It seemed important to the story that the action be plunged in darkness. With the colonial

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December 1828, the first two seasons of the Dutchman having run their course, the playwright signed full rights of publication to the well-known firm of John Cumberland (for £19). When it became clear that the Surrey was planning its own Dutchman late in 1829, Yates and Mathews quickly repurchased the copyright from the publisher in anticipation of a successful court action. But the saga did not end there. Sometime in 1827, Fitzball had sold a second copyright to another more obscure theatrical print publisher, Mrs Jamieson, who had issued her print of the melodrama a year before Cumberland's. Not only this, but the author had distributed many of his own manuscript copies to interested buyers (such as Cooke, who had performed it at the Dublin and Surrey theatres). Triumphant, Elliston's 24 October playbill announced that he had tracked down and bought Mrs Jamieson's copyright. The original Flying Dutchman; or the Phantom Ship, therefore, was announced at the Surrey on 27 October 1829. In the end, the Master of the Rolls' judgement gave Elliston full rights to the piece under the license granted by Fitzball to Cooke. Elliston triumphed twice over; see The Courier (24 October 1829), 3e and Elliston's introduction to Moncrieff, 'The Flying Dutchman; or the Spectral Ship', v–xiv.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>19</sup> 'Obi' Smith played Samiel in the June 1829 performances given by Schütz's touring opera company. These Covent Garden stagings were among the first properly German operas seen in London. Smith recalled: 'I only went through the pantomimic business of the character and had nothing to say, the papers the next morning complimenting me on my manner of speaking the German language'; see Smith, 'Autobiographical Sketches', 58.

landscape barely in view (the outdoor scenes difficult to make out), ticket holders were more auditors than spectators. Visual concealment portended something far greater than casual scenic circumstance. Although increasingly significant to British interests, the Cape was on the brink of falling out of dramatic representation; it would disappear from the stage for more than two decades. Even as the number of Dutchmen in circulation increased, South Africa was drawing back from the footlights – building up and dying away. At the limits of representability, it was only just about in the theatrical frame.<sup>20</sup>

### **The birth of melodrama, or the invention of South Africa**

South Africa had not always had such an indistinct history. In the beginning was The Capture of the Cape of Good Hope (1795) for keyboard alla battaglia – probably the first musico-dramatic depiction of South Africa to appear in London. According to annotations in the score, the music begins with the British forces dragging a single cannon through the sand on Muizenberg Beach.<sup>21</sup> Bare octaves speak into the void. It is 14 September 1795 – an empty, dead space of C's, E's, G's, E flats and F sharps. By the sixth vignette of Cecilia Maria Barthelemon's sparse battle-piece, a song and a dance celebrate British victory – the combined Dutch-Khoi forces surrendered, the warships come into view and the colony 'liberated'. This act of annexation (the Batavian Republic having returned briefly to power from 1803 to 1806) is significant in this sense: music is allowed to mediate, in some liminal way, in the invention (first imaginings) of modern South Africa. In these early years, there was only the odd scenic reference to the Cape in such pantomime spectacles as the 'New Historical Representation' that appeared at Sadler's Wells on 12 May 1790 (showing the recent passage of frigate Guardian crossing the South Seas and arriving triumphantly in Table Bay).<sup>22</sup> But before the age of the first true 'melo-dramas' – Pixérécourt's

<sup>20</sup> A belated six-show run from 31 October 1836 aside, 1829 capped the Dutchman's early popularity. Fitzball's masterpiece enjoyed a thirty-four night resurgence on 4 June 1856, at a time when another flurry of South African melodramas began to appear in London. Ethnographic shows also came into their own at this time. The 'live' Khoikhoi exhibit of 1847 (see The Times [19 May 1847], The Athenaeum [6 December 1845] and The Illustrated London News [12 June 1847]), the 'Earthmen' of 1853 on Regent Street (see The Illustrated London News (6 January 1855), 15) and the Zulus at St George's Gallery on Hyde Park Corner reported on by Charles Dickens in Household Words (11 June 1853) were cases in point.

<sup>21</sup> Cecilia Maria Barthelemon, The Capture of the Cape of Good Hope (London, 1795).

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Donohue, 'Burletta and the Early Nineteenth-Century English Theatre', Theatre Research 1/1 (1973), 24–51, and the playbill in the Harvard Theatre Collection. It featured a view of Lieutenant Riou steering his vessel through islands of ice. Scenes of 'Table Bay and Mountain, Cape of Good Hope'

Coelina, ou l'Enfant du mystère (1800) or Holcroft's A Tale of Mystery (1802) – the country was too indistinct, unknown for full narrative representation. Melodrama had not yet become recognisable in popular theatre; South Africa had not yet established itself in the imperial imagination.

The scenic uncertainty eased somewhat when Covent Garden staged John Eyre's 'music-opera' The Caffres; or, Buried Alive. A story about shipwreck, ritual sacrifice and racial terror, Eyre's creation lasted only one night (2 June 1802).<sup>23</sup> Eight seasons passed before the New Theatre brought out The Hottentot Venus; or, Harlequin in Africa (3 December 1810). This pantomime capitalised on the famous Khoi human-exhibit, Sara Baartman, who had created a sensation when Henrick Caesar showed her in Piccadilly as 'a most correct and perfect Specimen of that race of people' two months earlier.<sup>24</sup> In 1814, when the colony was ceded to Britain as repayment for a six-million-pound Dutch debt, a piece probably based on Eyre's Caffres, The Savage Chieftain; or, Buried Alive, premiered at the Surrey Theatre (10 May); the short-lived East London Theatre's The Savage Chieftain; or, The Shipwrecked Sailor and his Dogs (16 September 1816) probably bowdlerised its plot. A spate of productions accompanied the rise of radical unrest before Peterloo. Interest in the colony was flared in July 1819, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nicholas Vansittart, rose in parliament to identify massed emigration to the Cape as a potential source of domestic relief.<sup>25</sup> William Barrymore's Cape of Good Hope; or, Caffres and Settlers appeared three months later at Astley's Amphitheatre. (State-sponsored emigration began in earnest in 1819 and 1820 when a consignment of approximately 3500 souls left for the colony.) Zomai, the Caffre Chief expanded on the role of Barrymore's Xhosa chief at the Coburg Theatre, or 'the Blood Tub', the

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also appeared on 9 April 1817 at the Surrey theatre as part of the 'comic pantomime' Magic Grape; or, Harlequin in the Wine Trade; see Playbills 310 in The British Library.

<sup>23</sup> The Monthly Mirror (June 1802), 421 and the advertisement in The Morning Chronicle 10,301 (2 June 1802), 2c. The 'music-opera' (an early melodrama on the evidence of its libretto) was hissed despite an apology being made for the absence of favourites, Joseph S. Munden and Nancy Storace (Mozart's original Susanna in Le nozze di Figaro). The playbill listed Russell, Nicks and Baker as contributors to the music, although John Davy composed most of the score.

<sup>24</sup> The Morning Post (20 September 1810) and Z. S. Strother, 'Display of the Body Hottentot', Bernth Lindfors, ed., Africans on Stage (Bloomington, 1999), 1–61. Sara also played Khoi music for interested onlookers.

<sup>25</sup> On 12 July, Vansittart proposed a grant of £50,000 to assist unemployed workmen to emigrate to the Cape. His proposal was enthusiastically applauded (for 20 minutes!) and passed, see Parliamentary Debates XV, 1,549–51.

following year (19 April 1820).<sup>26</sup> The popular The Shipwreck of the Grosvenor East Indiaman by J.H. Amherst, the true story of a shipwreck off Pondoland in 1782, made an entry in oriental guise at the Royalty Theatre in Wellclose Square on 14 October 1822. A few months before a Parliamentary Commission reviewed the success of Vansittart's emigration experiment, Fitzball's The Caffre; or the Settlers of the Cape arrived on behalf of the Olympic Theatre on the desk of George Colman, the censor, in early October 1825.

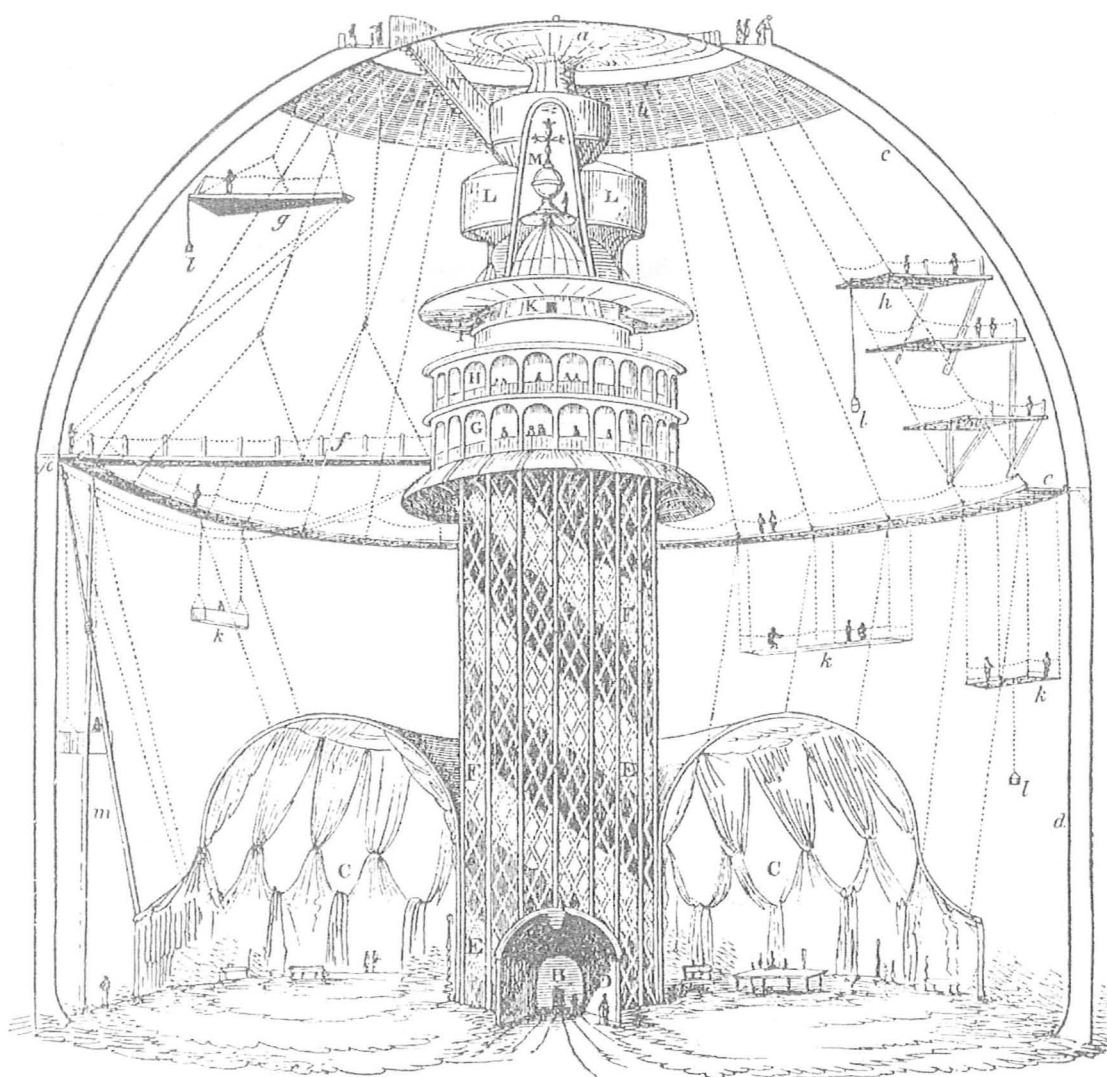
At this point, settings of South Africa moved onto shaky ground. Apparently for political reasons, Colman deleted all reference to the Cape in Fitzball's play, relocated the action across the Atlantic, and renamed the piece Omalá; or, the Settlers in America.<sup>27</sup> Still viewable in The British Library, his marks on the manuscript consigned the Caffre to much the same fate as the Dutchman (which followed a few weeks later); South Africa just about made it to scenic representation. A short while later, on 21 November, the unlicensed Surrey, which fell beyond the 20-mile-radius jurisdiction of the Westminster censor, brought out an 'illegitimate' piece, Olga the Dreadful Witch; or, a Caffre's Vengeance.<sup>28</sup> A year passed and, on 4 December 1826, the Adelphi's green curtain lifted on the last and by far the most successful production in a long line of South African melodramas, The Flying Dutchman. By the Dutchman's third season, melodramatisations of the colony reached an impasse, as we have seen; the stage was strewn with signs that the Cape had grown unsuited to theatrical presentation. This is not to say, as the lights came down and orchestras packed away their instruments, that the colony would vanish entirely. On the contrary: an alternative way of perceiving South Africa was just emerging, taking over where the theatre feared to tread.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Nicholson supplied the music for Barrymore's production, the scenery by the young Clarkson Stanfield. Zomai was scored by T. Hughes.

<sup>27</sup> This piece managed a one-night-only revival on 6 June 1829 at the Surrey under another bowdlerized title, Omalá; or, the Indian Sacrifice; see The Times (6 June 1829), 3a.

<sup>28</sup> The Theatrical Observer (10 January 1825) noted that Olga was based on a melodrama breaking all the records in Paris.

<sup>29</sup> Another South African production was William Barrymore's burlesque, Flying Dutchwoman; or Harlequin and the Enchanted Bay. Featuring a cross-dressing Mr Lawrence as 'Frousen Vanderdecken', it ran from 4 June 1827 to 6 August at Astley's Amphitheatre (see Playbills 170 in The British Library). After a long absence, South African melodrama had to wait for the early 1850s before it made another spate of appearances. C.S. James' The Kaffir War (see The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 58,275 ff 347–410b) was presented to the censor in 1851, alongside Bosjesman or Bush Rangers, Last of the African Settlers (Manuscripts ff. 623–632b). Fitzball's Amakosa; or, Scenes of Kaffir Warfare (Astley's, 1853) appeared two years later, with the semi-factual prophet Mokanna, 'a deformed Kaffir', in the title role.



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|---------|--|------|--|
| A       | Column for supporting Ascending Room, etc.           | a, b | Sky-lights   |
| B       | Entrance to Ascending Room                           | c    | Plaster dome on which sky was painted  |
| C       | Saloon of Arts                                       | d    | Canvas on which the townscape was painted  |
| D       | Passage leading to Saloon, Ascending Room and stairs | e    | Gallery suspended by ropes used for painting the distance and uniting the plaster and canvas                     |
| E, F    | Two separate flights of stairs                       | f    | Catwalk  |
| G, H, I | Viewing galleries                                    | g    | One of 15 triangular platforms used for painting the sky   |
| K       | Refreshment Room                                     | h    | Platforms used for finishing and clouding the sky  |
| L       | Rooms for music or balls                             | k    | Different methods for getting at the lower parts of the canvas   |
| M       | The old Ball from St. Paul's                         | l    | Baskets for conveying colours, etc. to the artists   |
| N       | Stairs leading to outside of building                | m    | Shears from which cradle was suspended for completing the picture after the removal of the scaffolding and ropes |

Plate 12. Cross section of the 'The Regent's Park Colosseum' engraved for *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction* XIII/356 (14 February 1829), 27. Patrons would enter a tented 'vestibule' before proceeding up the first hydraulically-powered lift ('Ascending Room') to the first tier. This 'gallery' presented a clear view of the capital from the summit of St Paul's, at an eye-line true to the perspective of the painting. As if to underline the panorama's 'better than the real thing' credentials, the ball and cross that originally surmounted the Cathedral (recently replaced) could be viewed at the centre of a fifth-floor room built for music and dancing. The 'African Glen' occupied the so-called 'Stalactite Caverns', a maze of underground chambers below and to the south of this main attraction.



Within days of the last Dutchman on 24 November 1829, the largest panorama ever built, the Regent's Park Colosseum – a construction modelled on the Pantheon in Rome and encasing an awesome 40,000 square-foot view of London – threw its doors open to the public. Plans for an 'African Glen' under the centre were realised only two years later. The spectacular, fogless view of the neo-Augustan imperial city, after all, was only half-finished when the building opened. George IV's grand scheme of city improvements for a new London as world capital and imperial metropolis displayed in perpetual 360-degree sunshine above; below, somewhere beneath the complex, was an alter-environment of stuffed animals, in situ displays and panoramas exhibiting 'every aspect' of the Cape. The colony had shifted out of the theatre such as to re-emerge elsewhere. Moving out from the shadows, South Africa flitted back into silent focus under the Glen's atmospheric gaslighting.<sup>30</sup>

Entered through the doorway of a reconstructed native hut, the 'African Glen' introduced the visitor to what the bill described as a 'flourishing memorial of British enterprise and perseverance', the emigrant community of Grahamstown. These pleasant village scenes quickly gave way to the shade of the glen proper, the patron now encountering various 'specimens of Natural History' (stuffed hyenas, 'tigers', vultures and other animals 'busied in the work of destruction'). The fiercest of these exhibits, the Morning Chronicle pointed out, 'appear to be starting from their dens as if with the intension [sic] of attacking the intruder' (see Plate 13).<sup>31</sup> Arranged in 'attitudes and positions, and in the acts of destruction and self-preservation that render present appearance most spirited, correct and natural', these startling figures pursued the viewer at length into an 'Immense Cavern' at the heart of the exhibition.<sup>32</sup> This discovered (for the illusion of first contact was vital), a colossal panorama by Thomas Mann Baynes 'burst upon the view': an ambitious 360-degree summary of the whole of 'Cafferland' ('from drawings taken on the spot'). A handbill guided the eye, first to John Thackwray, who was mauled by an elephant in March 1828: 'the appalling spectacle' of his body being thrust through by the beast's

<sup>30</sup> From a modern perspective, only the building's immensity rescues it from the comic. Byron's description of London comes to mind: 'A mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping,/ Dirty and dusky, but as wide as eye .../ A huge dun cupola, like a fool's-cap crown/ On a fool's head – and there is London Town; cited on the frontispiece to Hawthorn, A Visit to Babylon with Observations Moral and Political, n.p.

<sup>31</sup> The Morning Chronicle (2 May 1833).

<sup>32</sup> The Times (21 April 1835).

tusks and his corpse being trampled into the dust. Further around: the massacre of Lieutenant Farewell and his party by a dissident Zulu chief in August 1829 on the banks of the Umzimvubu, including detailed depictions of Farewell's 'mutilated remains', several brutally speared horses, and 'the loud shouts of the savage horde, glutting themselves with the blood of the unfortunate victims'. Nearby: a lion pursuing a party of natives, running towards seventeen conical huts all erected in a large tree. Several other images continued the scene-on-scene melodrama. 'On leaving the cavern', the guidebook advertised, 'the spectator will observe amidst the mountainous scenery, a party of wandering Bushman' (the description left no clue as to whether these figures were also prepared by the taxidermist). An accompanying poem lamented their plight: 'whole days of danger – nights of ceaseless dread'. Always starving, these bulb-eating, hollow-eyed and ever-watchful creatures, publicity observed, lived in constant fear of violence, persecuted not only by hordes of predators but by forced exposure to 'vast solitudes' and 'sterile deserts'. 'The name of Africa is associated', the pamphlet summed up, 'with ideas that at once awaken feelings of the deepest and most powerful nature and fill the mind with sentiments at once painful and interesting'. The fearful state of the colony – Steedman would have wanted to heighten this aspect to draw attention to his bravery – made for the generally 'wild and degraded character of its inhabitants'.<sup>33</sup>

Locked in a halfway world between exhibition and theatre, such scenes reified South Africa's brand of hyperdrama. Above all, this netherworld of saloons and caverns habited by animals, natives and brooding scenographies was remarkable for muteness. Crying out from behind walls and skins, the melodrama of each story lingered. But the narrative-temporal element provided by the orchestra, the sounds through which these South African representations were usually passed, had been silenced. Freshly imagined, the colony had been stripped of movement, weight, feeling, depth, continuity, time and, crucially for this argument, sound. The only noises heard now – in this twilight zone – were the hushed whispers of the patrons and the hollow music of their shuffling feet.

<sup>33</sup> The panorama bill, *The African Glen*, is in the Guildhall Library Theatre Collection (1833). In October 2001, following an uproar at the Barcelona Olympics, Spain returned a stuffed Bushman to Botswana, his body having recently been taken off public display in a small museum in Banyoles, north-east of Madrid. Most Natural History museums in Europe have Bushman heads in their vaults (The British Museum keeps four 'for research purposes', as does Cambridge University's Duckworth Collection). It seems likely, given the number of full-bodied *anatomie vivantes* on show since the eighteenth century, that many of the best examples remain hidden; see Pippa Skotnes, ed., *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town, 1996).

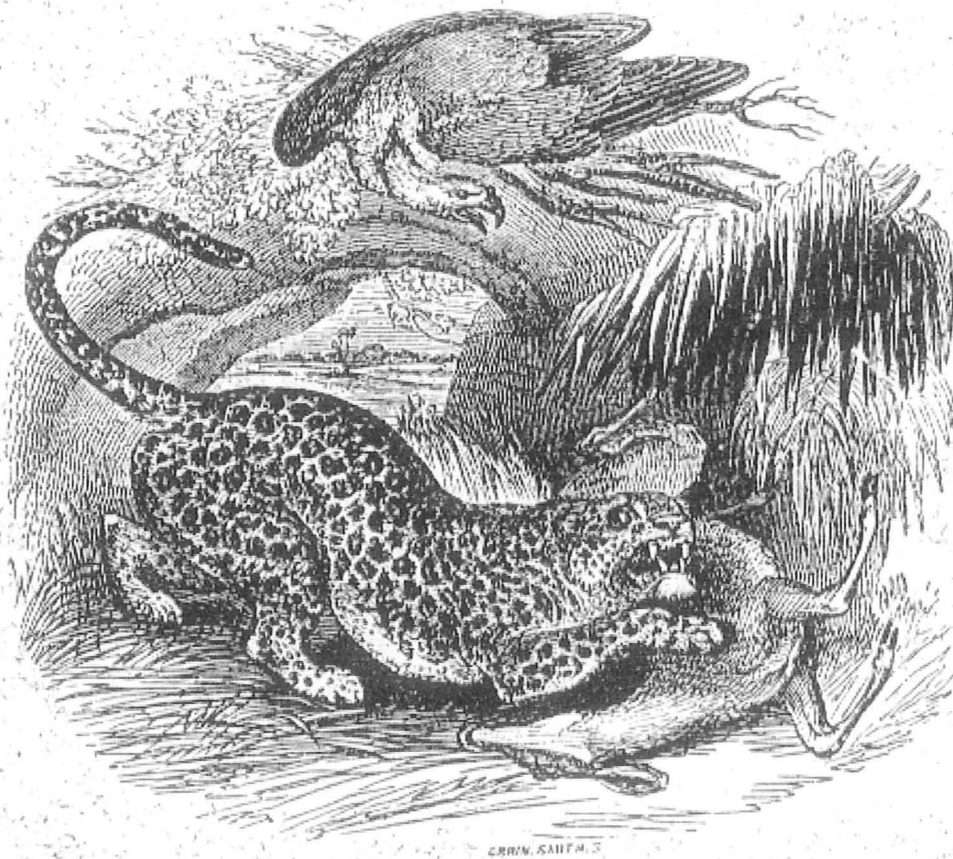


Plate 13. Frontispiece of Andrew Steedman's Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of South Africa (London, 1835), taken from a scene in the 'African Glen'.

And so, at the coincidence of The Caffre, Dutchman and the 'Glen', a great silencing took place. The contradictory demands in colonial melodrama for accuracy and music, description and narrative, were working against each other. Whilst The Caffre and Dutchman struggled to realise a choking landscape on stage, so the Colosseum sketched plans for a muzzled South Africa beneath Regent's Park. This move from stage to exhibition affected both old and new; popular theatre became less 'musical' too. By relieving the stage of its colonial baggage, in fact, the exhibition obliquely induced a new, quieter form of 'romantic' melodrama. Shorn of exoticism, popular theatre no longer needed such heavy reliance on music.

Melodrama of course boasted a history of exoticism, having evolved out of the pantomime spectacles of the 1790s. Still appearing in the 1820s, these pantomimes generally presented travel scenes, current or historical events in primitive 'newsreel' formats (panoramic or dioramic displays with actors staging 'reality' against sparse musical accompaniments). If melodrama was plot-driven by

comparison, it owed much to the exotic realism of this predecessor, although, over time, pantomimic truth-claims could no longer be sustained. By the late 1820s, popular theatre flaunted an extravagance that made the actualities once evoked by earlier docudramas unconvincing. Pantomime spectacle was now far too complicated and grand to be believable. Increasingly, anything that moved or had narrative sense – dramatic, dioramic or musical – slipped to the level of scene-shifting and story-telling. (Stillness, more and more, was seen to be a better measure of objectivity, of ‘what exists’, as in the quietly all-encompassing panorama, the photograph or the mutely feminine ballerina. At the dawn of what Heidegger called ‘the Age of the World-Picture’, the narrow economy of the image took on a new seriousness. Snapshots became culture’s new reality-fetish.) Sophisticated staging techniques only frustrated vivid representations of the Truth, technology hindered rather than helped. This was why, in the absence of an objective ground, melodrama began to rely on fantasy; a mixed ‘colonial gothic’ genre emerged in the late 1820s. (At the threshold of these trends, of course, was the Dutchman, mixing the fantastic with the real, horror with actuality.) Since the loss of objectivity in the theatre needed cultural compensation, an alternative order of representation had to arise. Which was why, when colonial subjects passed onto the new imperial exhibition of the 1830s, melodrama finally broke from its exotic past.

In melodrama of the 1830s, subjects took on a domestic personality: a local political concern for situation and dialogue took over from a broad geopolitical fascination for location and spectacle. The form moved closer to home; scenographer stepped aside for stage director. The preoccupation with shipwrecks, inter-racial intrigues, slave beatings, natural disasters and strange, misshapen monsters made way for stories of crime, prostitution, adultery, incest, parricide, personal dilemma, dinner-table scandal, private concealment, courtroom scenes and indoor sets. Conflict situations retreated into a more psychodramatic realm. Corresponding to what Richard Sennett famously called the ‘Fall of Public Man’, this drawing-inwards amounted to a masculation, or what Peter Garside has called a ‘male invasion’ of the private sphere. For the first time, the sentiments of personal emotion and the soapy feelings of love and rejection attracted a wide, male, middle-class audience. This emerged alongside both the so-called ‘romantic’ melodrama, and a growing male readership for mainstream fiction, a genre hitherto produced and consumed mostly

by women.<sup>34</sup> At the centre of these developments was the enormously popular nautical-military title (both literary and dramatic) which came into its own in the mid-1820s. The fad for these titles heralded the emergence of a new phase in male domesticity. Nautical-military subjects made the domestic and 'indoor' themes of melodrama respectable. After all, the soldier-ship was at once public (in that it was outgoing) and private (in that it tied its inmates to a close-knit environment). Just becoming possible, the romancing hard-man – the new male (a sensitive, reading, homely type, balancing his desire to be back home against the requirements of public duty) – began to take centre stage. And he did so – or rather the all-singing, all-dancing, sailor-boy did so – onboard ship.

At the threshold of these trends, the Dutchman brought together exotic and gothic themes in a nautical-military setting. As domestic introversion replaced exotic daring, so the importance of music in melodrama declined. Enormous ground had been won for the orchestra during the decline of pantomimic acting in the first two decades of the century. At a time when melodrama was establishing itself, the loss of an eighteenth-century language of gesture (a detailed art of codified poses and attitudes with set meanings) was compensated for by a more comprehensive, colourful and characteristic sound-world. Early melodrama defined itself solely on the basis of its use of the orchestra, hence the prefix 'melo'. Strictly speaking, it had been a musical genre, which brought together, from the evidence of the few surviving orchestral parts, a small string section with an intimate but colourful band of flutes, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horns, trumpet and timpani.<sup>35</sup> But now that nautical subjects dominated the stage, such a music-centred conception was ebbing away. It was becoming more useful to classify the form in terms of its mixed (mélange) quality – its drawing-together of comic, tragic, pantomimic, balletic and operatic elements.<sup>36</sup> Melodramatic recitative, an improvised style of declaiming long sections

<sup>34</sup> See Peter Garside, 'The English Novel in the Romantic Era: Consolidation and Dispersal', Rainer Schöwerling, ed., *The English Novel 1770–1829* (Oxford, 2000), 74 and 63. Pixérécourt, in his *Dernière Réflexions* (1832), made the distinction here between 'mélodrame classique', a type of melodrama he approved of, and the modern 'genre romantique', a form he called 'shameless, filthy and disgusting'; see Gabrielle Hyslop, 'Pixérécourt and the French Melodrama Debate: Instructing Theatre Audiences', Redmond, ed., *Themes in Drama* 14, 61–85, 82.

<sup>35</sup> Shepherd argues for a revival of this sense in modern studies; see Janet Shepherd, 'The Relationship between Music, Text and Performance in English Popular Theatre, 1790–1840', Ph.D. diss. (University of London, 1991), 96. Unfortunately, very few scores in either printed or manuscript form survive – the Dutchman's included.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Harris wrote somewhat naively in 1827 that 'an entirely novel species of entertainment is performed, called melodrama, mixing, as the name implies (mêler drame), the drama, and ballet of action'; see Donohue, 'Burletta and the Early Nineteenth-Century English Theatre', 51.



of doggerel verse common before the early 1820s, was falling out of use. Whereas in the past, composers had been commissioned to write new scores for new productions, music directors were increasingly applying the same music to similar situations in entirely different plots. Through-composed sections of orchestral sound, tailor-made for location and place, were being replaced by short, stock-typed, recyclable melodic sequences: by blocks of 'caution', 'hurry' or 'seductive' music, used over and over again by the late 1830s. (In the context of the rise of the colonial exhibition, we might talk of the orchestra's clausturation, of it being choked into a series of set two- and four-bar units.) These brief set-pieces, interspersed at appropriate moments between the dialogue, were increasingly codified and standardised. By the 1830s, music would become so incidental to the sense of the narrative that the musical personality of the form would be all but lost. More and more people would see melodrama in the same general way it is seen today: as a socio-theatrical mode dealing in 'telling situation', hyperbole and excess.<sup>37</sup> Music would no longer be all-determining. People, 'real' events, even inanimate objects could be 'melodramatic'. At the time of the colonial display, in other words, the melodramatic orchestra, where once it had defined the form, was becoming a hanger-on.

This said, South Africa – from the Dutchman and Omala to the 'Glen' – remained a melodramatic space. As the genre crossed into silence, music-based to mode-based (from a category defined by its use of sound to one defined by extreme situation), so the colony grew silent. Its move from theatre to exhibition notwithstanding, South Africa always retained a closeness with melodrama, a form that was itself acquiring connotations beyond the stage. Of course, similar links were forged with many imperial possessions – India, Australia, Java, British Canada. But what made the intimacy doubly close in the case of the Cape was the fact that the country entered the imperial frame at the same time the new 'melo-drame' of London and Paris was establishing itself. Communicating its problems and fascinations, melodrama – to a large extent – made South Africa known. From the beginning, the mutating forms of melodrama were the principal means of providing

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Jerrold's testimony to the 1832 Select Committee sets this position neatly: 'I describe the legitimate drama to be where the interest of the piece is mental; where the situation of the piece is rather mental than physical. A melo-drama is a piece with what are called a great many telling situations. I would call that a melo-drama'; see Reports from the Committees 7 (London: House of Commons, 1832), 158.

information about the colony. Altogether, the discourse compelled in the way it mediated that drifting sense of the 'over there'. In fact, and here we can speak of the disciplinary – or better, colonising – function of representation: the reality of South Africa was not so much described in terms of melodrama, as prescribed by it.

### Histrionic South Africa

Melodramatic vision is paranoid: we are being persecuted, and we hold that all things, living and dead, are combining to persecute us. Or rather, nothing is dead. Even the landscape has come alive if only to assault us.

Eric Bentley<sup>38</sup>

At this point, it is tempting to digress and ask what South Africa was really like, as a foil to the way it was set out in London. But this actuality – the truth of the Cape in 1829 – resists specification. It is impossible to think outside the terms of dominant representation. In the early nineteenth century, as now, South Africa was drenched in melodramatic significance: an extreme territory where master turned on servant, servant on master, where the topography itself seemed to come alive and persecute its inhabitants in the best Pixérécourian tradition. Such a Manichaeistic landscape reproduced itself over and over in news reports, journals, newspapers and other official bulletins. A letter in an 1826 issue of the New Monthly Magazine was typical: a man roasted alive in an oven; in 1822, the son of Afrikaner clergyman executed for flogging a servant to death; two cases of slaves attempting to poison their masters; Khoi/Hottentot/bastard rebellions and mass hangings in 1823; April, the slave of a Mr A. de Villiers lynched in Stellenbosch and his dismembered head and hand publicly displayed on a pole.<sup>39</sup> Regular newspaper briefings kept up to date with the latest 'Caffer irruption' or 'attack of the Caffer horde' on the eastern frontier – the Fifth (1819) and Sixth (1834) Frontier Wars.<sup>40</sup> By 1823, only half of the Cape's 1820 settlers sent out after Vansittart's proposal still farmed their lands. Reports streamed in of violent tropical storms from 1820 to 1823, five continuous years of crop sickness, serious drought in the 1825–6 season, relentless Xhosa raids and an inept and uncaring resident authority.<sup>41</sup> In early April 1829, the first Europeans to cross

<sup>38</sup> Eric Bentley, The Life of the Drama (London, 1965), 203.

<sup>39</sup> Y., 'Letters from South Africa', The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal 17 (1826), 484–6.

<sup>40</sup> The Times (10 February 1820), 3d.

<sup>41</sup> Settlers tended to overstate their plight, precisely to win more benefits from London. The Graham's Town Journal, a case in point, engaged in deliberate scare-mongering before the Sixth Frontier War,

overland from the colony to Delagoa Bay in modern-day Mozambique, Cowie and Green, died from what was described as a 'fever created by the putrid effluvia arising from the swampy country towards the Bay'.<sup>42</sup> Melodrama penetrated every corner of the colony.

Every level of authority was tyrannous, from the most unthinking savage chief, native father and white farmer to the governor-general himself. Custom, superstition, degradation, and despotism brutalised every soul. 'The Caffer classes his *umfaz* (or wife) and *ingegu* (packhorse) together', Steedman remarked in a book that told the story behind the capture of each of his 'Glen' animal specimens.<sup>43</sup> According to the widely-read travelogue of William John Burchell (1822), the Bushman would regularly bury his children alive or strangle them if food were scarce. He might even kill his brother in order to get at the widow – something apparently countenanced as a bone fide act of acquisition. 'Tame Hottentots seldom destroy their offspring, except in a fit of passion', a London Missionary Society periodical conceded, 'but the Boscheman [sic] will kill their children without remorse on various occasions'. It was also common, reportedly, for them to leave ageing relatives to die as they moved from place to place.<sup>44</sup>

Not only subjected to familial strife, the inhabitants of the colony laboured under sustained administrative persecution, something conceded even in Westminster. After persistent Whig pressure and continued media attacks on 'the iron arm of uncontrolled power', Lord Charles Somerset was recalled to London early in 1826 to answer allegations pertaining to his office as governor of the Cape. A commission of enquiry dredged up accusations ranging from autocratic mismanagement to sexual misdemeanours with a notable female transvestite, Dr James Barry. In 1829, under the still conservative administration of Governor Galbraith Cole, legislation was forced down from London aimed at relieving what was interpreted as massive imperial repression. January's Ordinance 50 deposed pass-laws criminalising vagrancy, prohibited punishment without trial, and

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stirring up a 'war psychosis'; see Timothy Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (London, 1996), 156.

<sup>42</sup> *The South African Quarterly Journal* I (1829–1830), 101.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Steedman, *Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of South Africa*, 2 vols (London, 1835), I, 45.

<sup>44</sup> *The South African Quarterly Journal* I (1829/30), 175. The second volume of this journal wrote: 'The Bushman's conception of a Supreme Being is, that he is an evil deity, and their notion of futurity, that there will be an eternity of darkness, in which they will live forever, and feed on grass alone'; see *The South African Quarterly Journal* II (1830), 81.

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abolished compulsory service. Later that year, Ordinance 60 set up the conditions for the Cape's first free press and a new charter of justice. The Commissioner-General, Andries Sockenström ordered, the expulsion of Maqoma's Xhosa chiefdom on the frontier and the creation of a free homeland (the Kat River Settlement) to 'collect the remnants of the Hottentot race, to save them from extirpation, to civilise and Christianize them'.<sup>45</sup> By 1834, the colony achieved a total ban on slavery, and when Benjamin D'Urban ousted the western Xhosa by taking their land between the Fish and the Kei rivers for William IV in May 1835, the humanitarians in London ordered his immediate retreat.<sup>46</sup>

Such liberality even extended to the much-hated Dutch. Their dull indolence and violent ways could be reformed, it was widely held, with good English relief. 'Regarded as a body of men', a correspondent in the New Monthly Magazine wrote, '[they] possess many estimable qualities. If they have acquired many of the opposite description, it is because they have been so long doubly debased by the curse of slavery, and the deprivation of good government'. The strength of such thinking lay in the argument that the imperial takeover of the Cape was, more than anything, a magnanimous gesture. British rule was good for the indigenes, precisely because it saved them from themselves, offering them respite from their own backward, corrupt and obnoxious ways. 'Let England remove that unspeakable curse [despotism]', the Magazine concluded, 'and govern them as she should do'.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the 1826 Commission of Enquiry into the colony recommended, not only that the Burgher pachts (citizen laws), monopolies, duties and regulations be scrapped, but that a tax on servants be implemented to stimulate the Afrikaner to industry and make him more useful to himself. Harshly oppressive conditions and the dictates of sympathy, in other words, legitimised the administration of every minor punitive procedure and made empire-building a charitable and logical affair.

Given such a state of affairs, it was only natural to feel for the poor natives (the downtrodden in Africa), and more than feel, to listen and hear their cry. In every case – Settler, Afrikaner, Khoi or Xhosa (though in varying degrees) – pity for the downtrodden in Africa, under the aegis of official policy, involved imposing on them

<sup>45</sup> J. B. Peires, 'The British and the Cape, 1814–1834', R. Elphick and H. Giliomee, ed., The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1840 (Middletown Conn., 1989), 472–518, 484.

<sup>46</sup> John S. Galbraith, Reluctant Empire; British Policy on the South African Frontier 1834–1854 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963), 128–54.

<sup>47</sup> Y., 'Letters', 488.



an affecting musicality. Taking shape within the sphere of melodrama, South Africa – and this is a colonial topos – seemed particularly ‘musical’, or at least displayed the code’s shifting relationship with music. The proto-ethnomusicology of the early century identified music as the colonial language par excellence. The actual linguistic utterances of the natives were, in any event, senseless. The Khoi were a case in point: walking in single file, all chattering and clicking away without ever communicating. Fortunately, the musical aptitude of these people, their nonsense-speak notwithstanding, confirmed them as an aural people, always listening, forever attentive, and hence pliable, open to instruction and civilisation. ‘The ears and voices of the Hottentots are naturally very musical, and those who have been taught to sing by the Moravian missionaries excel as vocalists’, observed the June 1829 issue of the London Literary Gazette.<sup>48</sup> Contact with the darker-skinned ‘demi-savage’ ‘Kaussis’ (Xhosa) to the east, as an 1819 article in the Times made clear, at first encountered a ‘greatly injured people’ with a ‘soft and harmonious’ language.<sup>49</sup>

The decline of the Rousseauvian concept of the noble savage at the time of the colonial exhibition, however, altered his apparently harmonious relationship with music. Natural man’s once malleable disposition hardened in a process H.L. Malchow has called a ‘gothicisation of race and racialisation of the gothic’,<sup>50</sup> into a thing far more terrifying. Growing frustration with the intransigence of the colonised mind led to a less flattering, a-musical demonisation of his body. Steedman’s 1835 description of a Xhosa war-dance, a ‘hundred or more unclad Africans ... in furious engagement’ smeared with red clay, was typical: ‘all that I had ever read in poetry or romance of the Court of Pandemonium, or the Hall of Eblis’, he wrote, probably recalling Robert Burford’s recent Leicester Square panorama of Milton’s vision of hell in *Paradise Lost* (which ran from 30 December 1829 to 17 February 1830), ‘fell infinitely short, to my imagination, compared with the realities before me’.<sup>51</sup> Even the most extreme forms of conventional representation could not match colonial actuality. At the limits of wonder, South Africa began to evoke, in the words Peter

<sup>48</sup> The London Literary Gazette Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c. 646 (6 June 1829), 380.

<sup>49</sup> ‘The Kaffers’, The Times (2 July 1819), 3c.

<sup>50</sup> Howard Leroy Malchow, Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain (Stanford, 1996), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Steedman, Wanderings and Adventures in the Interior of South Africa, 5. For Burford’s panorama, see Ralph Hyde, Panoramania! (London, 1988), 74.

Brooks (one of melodrama's more eminent apologists), 'the reality of a world beyond representation'.<sup>52</sup>

That Steedman, the proprietor of the 'African Glen', should recall the silent stasis of a panorama in his description of the Xhosa war dance is significant. A type of representation 'beyond representation' was evolving under his management – a stifling of colonial space – which, by locking music and movement, took the scene-closing tableau of theatrical melodrama, conventional at moments of onstage tension (where all the characters froze), and turned it into one, massive, permanent fixture – the fixed installation of the exhibition. This unresolved end-scene aspect of melodrama reaches full volume, as it were, when representations become so clogged with meaning as to petrify. Taking an ordinary melodramatic convention and amplifying it, the 'Glen' stages a moment of hyperreality, a snapshot around which the spectator moves and imagines himself (It is in this sense of his being in the event which makes it different from staged melodrama). A highly charged environment more real than real materialises around him, where his own lack of comprehension, sheer astonishment and estrangement from events is coded into the marvellous slowing-down of scenic arrangements – the 'still lifes'.

This is an important moment in South African history, where, at the time of the Dutchman, several levels of meaning are allowed to pass through bodies and objects: from the supple, clear logic of the spoken word; to the extreme language of music (where meaning flows too freely); to the hard stop of muteness – the blank of silence. As we move through the halfway world of the Caffre, Dutchman and into the 'Glen' somewhere in late 1829, a toing and froing takes place between what has been (a soft, malleable, theatrical colonial type) and what will come (an opaque, frightening subject). The imperial and political imperatives in these hardening and silencing movements, of course, are obvious: betrayed by the increasingly threatening, restrained and shut up actualities on the ground. At the time of the Dutchman, the Caffre and the 'Glen', we are confronted with shifts in the idea of melodrama which manage, in every way, the unfolding historical reality of South Africa.

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<sup>52</sup> Cited in William Morse, 'Desire and the Limits of Melodrama', Redmond, ed., Themes in Drama 14, 24.

### **The aquatic realms of madness; or the forearm of the black lunatic**

In an act of deferral, this colonial estrangement, racial hardening and exotic quietening – at the dawn of the era of biological racism – was presided over by new systems of organising people at home. The emergence of class thinking with the Reform Bill in 1832 governed the sense that it was difficult to see oneself, and have sympathy for different population groups. (This is the argument proposed in Elaine Hadley's book *Melodramatic Tactics*.) The increasing remoteness of colonial geography (despite record shipping times), the feeling of not being able to relate to the outside – of having no access to other knowledge-systems – linked, in this sense, to the rise of modern adversarial politics. As the libertarian stance of the early century faded away, so class became the nineteenth-century antagonism – the classic toughening of mutual prejudice. While in the beginning church-and-king Tories and brother radicals banded together to attack the very notion of class, by 1832 they were co-opted into class thinking: hence Chartism, and other 'working men' groups. The lower orders excluded themselves, in an act of supremely orthodox politics, by accepting the position of the underdog and agitating in numbers. As Wahrman has put it: 'it was not so much the rising middle class that was the crucial factor in bringing about the Reform Act of 1832, as it was the Reform Bill of 1832 that was the crucial factor in cementing the invention of the ever rising middle class'.<sup>53</sup> In the context of urban overcrowding and top-heavy schemes for dealing with an unwieldy populace, the business of modern statecraft – the art of administering people – presided over a growing sense of social disjunction. As the concordant world of benevolent masters and deferent servants receded into the eighteenth century, so the sectarian, fear-driven order of modernity took its place. Horizontal classification by type (difference was permanent, biological and mutually alienating) replaced the eighteenth-century vertical stratifications by rank (difference was natural, inter-relational and mutually dependent). These social realignments were fundamental, as we shall see, to the emerging mentality of melodrama. While radical groups represented themselves in the melodramatic terms of victimisation, voicelessness and being 'put in a state'; the ruling and professional orders saw radicals

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<sup>53</sup> Dror Wahrman, 'Virtual Representation: Parliamentary Reporting and Languages of Class in the 1790s', *Past and Present* 136 (1992), 83–113, 113.

melodramatising their plight in order to attract undue consideration. In the context of increasingly entrenched polemic, dialogue broke down.<sup>54</sup>

At the time of 1832 Reform, the condition of being beyond language or representability turned acute. The intellectual climate reflected this; critics found themselves drawn to descriptions of extreme public illness and the ailing social body. This was why the classic failure of sympathetic exchange, in the sense of failing to understand one another, was identified at the hospital – in the encounter between spectator and lunatic. This mutually defining relationship became a source of critical fascination around 1832; the ultimately unsympathetic encounter threw the wider social problem of non-discursive communication into high relief.<sup>55</sup> If any establishment represented in microcosm both the market-driven estrangements of the state and the hostile terms of the colonial encounter, then it was the asylum. Questions of insanity, surveillance and dissimilitude were key, as in Adam Smith's discourse 'Of Sympathy' in The Theory of the Moral Sentiments (1759), a book that reached its eleventh edition in 1825:

The poor wretch, who is in [madness], laughs and sings perhaps, and is altogether insensible of his own misery.... The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with present reason and judgement.<sup>56</sup>

The difficulty of maintaining poise between self and other in the context of segregation and internment boiled down to a crisis of communication; hence its relationship with melodrama, a form wrestling with institutionalisation and the problems of expression. Melodrama, at base, presupposed some disciplinary regime where harshly opposed forces clashed before being improbably resolved in some last-minute reversal. The melodramatic obsession with sequestration and plenary institutions – asylums, ships, prisons, dungeons, caverns, towers, colonies, factories, workhouses – underlined the genre's link with mental illness: themes of paranoia, hysterical delivery and so on. After all, the institution of the theatre, in the post-

<sup>54</sup> Hadley, Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace 1800–1885, 1–33.

<sup>55</sup> Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilisation, trans. Richard Howard (London, 2001).

<sup>56</sup> Adam Smith, The Theory of the Moral Sentiments, ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie (Oxford, 1976), 12.

revolutionary period, imagined itself as a morally instructive place; the punitive sounds and shapes of the auditorium functioned in a social, didactic and legislative way. Unruly audiences required nursing back to health.

As for the asylum, it became a regular feature in melodrama, as in Moncrieff's The Lear of Private Life (Coburg, 1820), based on Nahum Tate's edition of Shakespeare's King Lear and Amelia Opie's novelette Father and Daughter (1802). The climax of Moncrieff's piece occurs in a lunatic's cell, where an aria borrowed from Handel's Deborah, 'Tears such as aged father's shed', appears as an acoustic reminiscence overlapped with 'music express[ing] the agitation of the mind'. The nostalgic, retrospective chords of this aria – yearning for the restoration of an old society of deference in old-fashioned, strophic structures – punctuates the action at crucial points. The story centres on Agnes, whose disgraceful actions have forced her father, Fitzharden, out of his mind. In the final tableau of the play, with a standard performance of community, Agnes finds a picture-frame in the asylum behind which to sit and play her harp. Handel's aria recurs, Fitzharden recognises it, and is rescued from his madness; whereupon a closing 'picture of reconciliation' is formed joining together the couple, their servants, the hero, Alvaney, and a ready-to-hand baby. Walker's The Factory Lad (Surrey, 1832) peddled a similar theme. A particularly risqué piece, this melodrama addressed the 1830 Swing Riots and poaching (which, since 1803, had been a capital offence). In this piece, the gypsy-poacher Rushton's involvement in insurrection and agitation has tragic consequences: his poor wife, Jane, is driven off her head.

In a colonial sense, the symptoms of decay, the physical inscriptions of madness, could be detected in such ethnic determinates as Simian-like features. Blackness, in fact, could be not only a signifier of race but of lunacy. The first signs of this were already in play some thirty years earlier. Proto-evolutionist, Charles White, for example, wrote in his Account of the Regular Gradation in Man (1799):

The first Negro on the list, is one in the Lunatic Hospital in Liverpool. His for arm measures twelve inches and three quarters, and his stature is only five feet ten inches and a half. I have measured a great number of white people, from that size up to six feet four inches and a half; and amongst them, one who was said to have the longest arms of



any man in England; but none had a forearm nearly equal to that of the black lunatic.<sup>57</sup>

Stark positionings around class predicated a developing demonology of race, a maddening of colonial space, and the good-evil, right-wrong, black-white fixations of melodrama. Such moral polarities steered an increasingly hysterical and hemisphered dramatic form. Increasingly, the mute, insane and terrible stage-native had the excommunications of dominant culture conferred upon him, in spectacularised form.<sup>58</sup> This was colonial melodrama's ultimately orthodox function: to represent imperial discontents in race rather than class terms, to deflect the crises of domestic strife, to pass on the violence of classification, and to legislate for calmness. Class, in this way, mapped itself onto race, the estrangements of the state and the specular relationships of domestic life informing the increasingly hostile terms of the colonial encounter. Since difference was better dealt with in the dumbed-down entertainment-world of melodrama, it required less working out in the here and now. Inequalities of race, class and identity, in any case, were most comfortably onstage and overseas. (South Africa might be seen to bear the brunt of these deflections: on the upside-down side of the world, it mirrored imperial discontents in the same time zone.)

Such a stage trade in social ills functioned according to a strategy of appeasement at home and denigration abroad. A slave to this process, the melodramatic savage appeared in three increasingly degrading incarnations in the early nineteenth century. First was the 'noble savage', a stereotype established in the eighteenth century: an exotic in fancy dress definable by status (chief, warrior, prince, etc.). At the time of staunch liberal lobbying for the abolition of slavery around 1807, a second subjectivity emerged to accompany this heroic figure: a naked, destitute, pitiable creature – the original object of humanitarianism. Gilbert à Beckett remembered this second type as 'the old Constitution-loving and sentiment-spluttering Stage Nigger' – a vulnerable codling who stoops for the white man's compassion.<sup>59</sup> By the run-up to 1832 Reform and the colonial exhibition, Natural Man

<sup>57</sup> Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables; and from the Former to the Latter* (London, 1799), 229.

<sup>58</sup> An overblown example occurred in *The Lion, Chief of Cabul* (Coburg, 2 Nov. 1829), a melodrama set in Afghanistan, which depicted 'the Stupendous car of the Idol, beneath whose fatal wheels hundreds of the deluded fanatics voluntarily throw themselves and are sacrificed by being crushed under its perilous burden'; see Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840*, 100.

<sup>59</sup> Gilbert à Beckett, 'The Stage Negro', *Quizzology of the British Drama* (London, 1846), 14.

underwent a third, more frightening transmogrification. All but displacing those that had gone before him, a 'vulgar, dancing brute' arose: mute, dangerous and fit only for incarceration.<sup>60</sup>

In Fitzball's *Caffre* (1825) all three ethnic varieties take the stage. First, there is Omala, the lead character, who enunciates the verbose, nature-speak of the archetypal *novus homo* ('Lies the volcano of Omala's wrath expiring within him? Burst forth, indignant spirit of my race! Up, lightnings of revenge') and strides the stage as 'Son of the Earth' and heir to his father's Xhosa chieftdom. As a young man, we learn, the native prince saved the English heroine, Orilla, from a brutal attack on her father's plantation (during which her mother died). (Such a memory and the Act Two 'attack of the horde' recalled a real historical event: on 22 April 1819, 10,000 Xhosa warriors, having taken the prophet Nxele's anti-bullet *muti* [potion], made an ill-fated strike on Grahamstown.) Abducted as a child, the white girl, Orilla, has been brought up amongst the natives in Caffraria. Omala, for his part, has fallen in love with her (what would you expect from the upwardly-mobile hero?).

The second indigene we are introduced to is Orilla's devotee, Zamboo. He falls into the category of the pitiable house-boy, a type characterised by music- and nonsense-speak (Chick aboo, Chick aboo, Heigho! Heigho!). In the final Act, Orilla breaks the law of the tribe by freeing Eugene, a recently kidnapped Englishman. By way of punishment, she is sentenced to death 'at the sacrificial stake'. Zamboo's reaction is predictable: 'Zamboo him very miserable. Dey kill poor missa Orilla, and Omala no save her; no, him cannot. My people sing, dance; dey no feel; dat very bad... . Me begin to hate own nation, dem so cruel'.<sup>61</sup> Such gibberish – talking to oneself – situates Zamboo firmly within the linguistic confines of madness.<sup>62</sup> Zamboo speaks for the sake of speaking, in a mode of equivocation that gave the audience the sense they were asylum visitors. Piling meaning upon meaning, Zamboo's glossolalia confused by both inviting and evading comprehensibility. Delinquent singing had the same effect, as in his 'Air with action', which continues the scene:

So him lost when white man start

<sup>60</sup> Shepherd, 'The Relationship between Music, Text and Performance in English Popular Theatre, 1790–1840', 138–9.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Ball, *Omala; or Settlers in America* (London, 1825), 24. The manuscript is in The British Library in the Lord Chamberlain's Plays 8 (Add. 42,872, ff. 496–529b), with the original title, *The Caffre; or the Settlers of the Cape*.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of mad speech-song, see Michel de Certeau, 'Vocal Utopias: Glossolalia', *Representations* 56 (1996), 29–47.

Up in the forest, dark, alone –  
Chick aboo, chick aboo;  
Black man shoot him thro' the heart –  
Cruel, never mind him groan.  
Chick aboo, chick aboo.<sup>63</sup>

The maddening of the sense of primitive man is raised another notch when the tyrant-chief, Pultwana, enters the stage. Crazy dancing, threatening attitudes and static poses ensue as he and his henchman, Mahanoo (a character added in by the censor) marshal their vast cohort of silent warriors. Speaking only rarely in orchestral sound, these frightening figures embodied the third African type, vicious and depraved. (While Pultwana and his cohort were not mad à la Zambo, they were mad in a far more ferocious, engaging way.) In Act One's musical tableau, Orilla (desperately in love) helps Eugene escape while a drum of death signals the fatal outcome of his 'trial'. As events reach a climax, a 'Picture of Consternation' is formed: Orilla in a swoon, Pultwana standing over her 'in an attitude of the greatest wrath, holding up a Spear', with Omala 'regard[ing] him imploringly'.<sup>64</sup> Such mute arrestings – bodies frozen in moments of panic – captured the inexpressibility, the blocked hyperbole of the moment. Petrification and the 'Glen' were less than a step away.

With this stalled meaning – Pultwana's hard finality – in mind, we can speak of a poetics of taxidermy: the logic of open-mouthed dry-preserving firmly mounted upon a discourse of astonishment. As Descartes observed:

This causes the whole body to remain as immobile as a statue, and prevents our perceiving more of the object than the first face which is presented, or consequently of acquiring a more particular knowledge of it. That is what we commonly call being astonished, and astonishment is an excess of wonder which can never be otherwise than bad.<sup>65</sup>

Expressing 'the first face' – the horror – of Pultwana involved fixing his body into an inert, permanent sign-system. Any singing, moving or speaking was literally shut up. To remove the voice-box surgically – to perform a cordectomy – was, after all, to move towards the full preservation, dehydration and stuffing of the colonial subject. In retrospect, such an extreme loss of sound, voice, mobility and identity was hinted

<sup>63</sup> Ball, *The Caffre*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>65</sup> Translated in Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, 1991) (1991), 20.

at right from the days of The Caffres; or, Buried Alive (1802) or The Savage Chieftain; or, Buried Alive (1814). Having one's mouth and lungs filled with sand – underground suffocation – was a fate particularly associated with South Africa. (Brooks calls this 'the ultimate [Gothic] nightmare' in his discussion of Pixérécourt's last melodrama Latude, ou Trente-cinq ans de Captivité.) Being engulfed by the landscape involved this sense of becoming a slave to one's situation, to one's physical predicament. Descartes' 'excess of wonder' was encountered again and again in greater severity as audiences took in these breathless end-act tableaux. Tableau and blocking – excessive meaning clogging up progression – was about registering the shock of colonial contact, being 'put into a state', seeing mutants in muteness, and being afraid.<sup>66</sup>

In the progression from Omala to Zamboo to Mahanoo, to be sure, imperial culture did more than map its own fears onto exotic space. It upped the stakes, maddening and obscuring 'real' contact (whatever that might mean) with the representationally-violated subaltern. The problem of having representations of oneself shoved down one's throat – literally, in the melodramatic sense that one chokes and cannot speak back – was a problem thrust in extremis upon the colonial primogeniture. But he was not alone.

In 'shock' new urban centres, such as those springing up in the north and south-east of England, Ulster and Scotland, the savage found his equivalent in the low-class worker – the so-called 'Negro of Empire'. People were increasingly quantified in terms of the all-seeing market: according to labour function and social utility. Of course, resistance to any such bodily classification, to being stripped to the level of an industrial unit was fierce. The movement for the repeal of the new Corn Laws, Luddite riots against mechanisation, growing support for pauper relief, and resistance to such top-down measures as the 1834 Poor Laws (which instituted

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<sup>66</sup> This stuffing procedure also related to Scipion Pinel's famous prescriptions for the lunatic asylum in his Traité complet du Regime sanitaire des Aliénés (Paris, 1836). The three tenants in his new regime were silence, self-assessment in mirrors and perpetual judgement. The actions and speech of madness being unfathomable, the asylum, like the exhibition, would become a scopic environment of undistorted resemblance, silence and quiet observation; see Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilisation, 246–55. Mirrors feature prominently in the *Caffre*. The colonial governor's nephew, a money-grabbing city-slicker, has imported a box of looking glasses to sell to the natives. In the first scene of Act Two, he is seized by a mute band of Xhosa: 'they howl, and express their anger: they secure him, and beat him with the looking-glasses'. The directions continue: 'The music becomes more animated: they dance wildly round him, and carry him out, deaf to his remonstrances'; see Ball, Omala; or Settlers in America, 19. The natives, it appears, are hostile to being submitted to reflection; they are averse to representation.

workhouses) rose in melodramatic language against the statutory violence of class representation. For large swathes of the British public, at least until 1832, the impositions of class were just as insufferable as any material distress. As in any stock melodramatic narrative, being classified – or permanently set into a disciplinary category – meant being cut-off or as radicals often put it, 'de-nationalised'. As in any melodramatic setting, one encountered an unequal and despotic environment, where the familial bonds of duty were violated; where exploitation and deprivation were rife; and where the 'natural' bonds between master and servant, father and family had been disavowed. As in any melodramatic plot, one had been 'racialised', classed and deprived of a voice.

Silence was the noisiest signifier in melodrama. For many, melodrama was a reactionary discourse, resisting the representations of dominant order, bearing witness to social breakdown. The stock themes of dispersal and reunion, blockage and overcoming, characterised a stage-form where the visibly distressed and physically tortured actor screamed out across the orchestra in an intoned, checked style. His claustrophobic body – beckoning to the silent spectator in demented gestures – spectacularised the wider crisis of political expression. The right and ability to speak, in other words, were basic to the politics of the genre. Invoking the great serious pantomimists of the early century, 'Obi' Smith remembered 'men whose eloquent hands had a tongue, as it were, on the tip of each finger, men who spoke while they were silent and who knew how to make an entire recital without opening their mouths'.<sup>67</sup> Actors honed their skills for more than dramatic reasons; to depict disability was never to be naively semiotic.

As we have seen in melodrama, being forced from a position of clear-speaking often meant being rendered 'musical' (or in more extreme cases being completely mute). As if to play into this dynamic, heavy censorship and oppressive licensing laws banned spoken dialogue in the popular theatres unless it was accompanied by music (this strange situation persisted until the Theatre Act of 1843). Music was a legally enforceable requirement for those theatres that did not own 'speaking' patents. Granted way back in the reign of Charles II, these patents (now held by Covent Garden, Drury Lane and the little Haymarket Theatre) formed part of a wretchedly antiquated system of theatrical regulation. In the absence of a license,

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Shepherd, 'The Relationship between Music, Text and Performance in English Popular Theatre, 1790–1840', 116.



all stage rhetoric, all 'illegitimate drama', had to be watered down by the perpetual presence of music. If the authoritarian intention was to stunt dramatic clarity, resistance against such regulation only gave melodrama an enormous, enabling energy. The pent-up, pressurised quality of melodramatic recitative-dialogue, bordering on speech, carried an unnerving force. The father of the censor, George Colman, remembered of the first two decades of that century that: '[the minor theatres] made their Recitative appear like Prose, by the actor running one line into another, and slurring over the rhyme; soon after, a harpsichord was touched now and then, as accompaniment to the actor; sometimes once in a minute; -at last - not at all; -till in the process of time, musical and rhyming dialogue had been abandon'd'.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, melodramatic opposition to enforced 'musicalisation' had been so successful, that when versed recitative was encountered, as in the incantation scene of Olga, the Dreadful Witch (where the female hell-raiser quells a Hurricane in Table Bay from her lair on 'Devil's Mount'), it only emphasised the archaic quality of speaking over orchestral sound.<sup>69</sup> The effect of resisting music and dumbshow was such that when the proprietor of the Adelphi appeared before the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature in 1832, he sided (curiously) against throwing open the monopoly Drury Lane, Covent Garden and the Haymarket held on the spoken word. 'For God's sake', Charles Mathews implored, 'protect me from the regular drama, do not compel us to let the public expect the regular drama'.<sup>70</sup> Suppression and prohibition - being condemned to the music and near-speech of so-called 'illegitimate' culture - gave melodrama its raison d'être. It could not exist heavy official censure.

In the face of the legal confinement of melodrama, the only defence was to be anti-state. On one hand a trivialisation of domestic politics, as we have seen, melodrama was also (within limits) a powerful theatre of protest. Assisted by its mass appeal, the form engaged in a potent counter-representational politics of obfuscation and shifting identity. Vanderdecken, for one, while identifiable by status (sea captain), was otherwise unclassifiable. An ethnographic mutant in pantaloons - the Dutch were particularly hated before 1830 in the run-up to Belgian independence - Cooke, the published prints show, blacked-up (he used blue grease-paint) for the

<sup>68</sup> George Colman's (the elder) words in Donohue, 'Burletta and the Early Nineteenth-Century English Theatre', 46.

<sup>69</sup> Samuel Beazley's Adelphi hit, The Elephant of Siam (3 December 1829) had a similar scene where Korassan the Usurper mystically invoked the Fire Fiend; see Playbills311, 10 January 1825 in The British Library.

<sup>70</sup> Reports, 166.

role (see Plate 14). The character of Peter von Bummel also appeared in ethnic confusion, the Courier describing John Reeve (playing him) as 'a kind of half Dutchman and half Cockney, who dabbles in the law'.<sup>71</sup> Animal-human crossovers were also common, as in Reeve's drawling donkey-speak ('Ich, ich, mynheer! Yaw! Yaw! Kaller de Holland kesta speken')<sup>72</sup> and comic character's Toby Varnish disguising of himself as a bear in Act Two. These were matched, furthermore, by the tendency to fudge sexuality, as in Reeve's dressing-up as a shepherdess in Act Three. In the long tradition of female grotesques, 'the Evil Spirit of the Deep', Rockalda (who grants Vanderdecken his time ashore) was played by one Mr Yardley. Generic transgression and cross gendering were part of the form's subversive glossolalia, as in the innumerable androgynous sailor-heroes on stage and the so-called 'breeches parts', where women played men. But the most compelling character in melodrama, inevitably, was the villain: a Balzacian diabolical genius by 1830. A rational lunatic, Vanderdecken (half-living and half-dead) was as much an inmate in the asylum as a perfectly reasonable visitor to it. The hero, meanwhile, was not completely sane. Never the thinking type, he acted on impulse, in careless ferocity.



Plate 14. A Blacked-up Cooke as Vanderdecken  
in Jamieson?, ed. The Flying Dutchman (ca. 1830), 9.

<sup>71</sup> The Courier (5 December 1826), 3d. Another paper described Reeve 'distorting his shape worse than Mr Liston', a specialist in grotesquery. The Morning Chronicle (5 December 1826), 3a.

<sup>72</sup> Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', 28.

To add to this sense of shifting identity, melodrama was a slippery genre. Nobody knew what it was. The Dutchman, for example, on being submitted to the censor, was labelled a 'burletta', an ambiguous designation to which minor theatres were licensed to adhere. When the Lord Chamberlain asked the censor to clarify what the term meant in 1824, the official replied that 'you may fairly say, that it is easy sometimes to say what is not a Burletta, tho' it may be difficult to define what a Burletta is. Five or six songs in a Piece of one Act, where the songs make a natural part of the Piece', he continued, 'may be perhaps considered so far a Burletta ... tho' there is always the question, whether a Burletta must not be in verse, and the whole sung, not said; which makes the question dangerous'.<sup>73</sup> While the advertisements for the Adelphi Dutchman invariably stuck to labels such as 'nautical burletta' or 'serio-comic burletta'<sup>74</sup> (so as to emphasise authenticity), the Surrey referred variously to 'nautical melo-dramas', 'nautical dramas', 'melo-dramas' or just 'dramas' in the playbills. Indeed, it was not uncommon to find such mishmash descriptions as 'grand serio-comic romantic melodramas', as in Valentine and Orson (Surrey, 22 May 1820), a story about a speechless wild man reared by a she-bear in medieval France.<sup>75</sup>

Not being able to tie such theatre-pieces down added to a mode of delirium, nowhere more unhinging than in the Dutchman; here we return to the Adelphi and that cool night in late October 1829. The loose, ill-defined shapes that gathered onstage became so burdened with signs and allusions that they fell into madness. Melodrama's jabbering world – its economy of pure signs – developed a sense of talking to itself – of losing firmness. A dark tale of eternal separation – a sea captain and his crew doomed to rage forever upon the open sea – took on a new, ocean-like immensity. In the absence of voice, everything speaks, the scenography coming to life in the surging sea, the flashing illusions, the extreme landscape. Vanderdecken's return is written into the scenery, the stage strewn with relics and signs of his former presence. Semantic debris – a 'sea-trunk' full of his long dead wife's clothing, a 'Gothic chair', the portraits of Vanderdecken and his (Lestelle-like) spouse – portends the sense of ossification, of being trapped by the past. The endlessly repeating cycles of 1729–1829, the recurring Dutchman's song 'Return, O my Love, and we'll never,

<sup>73</sup> Donohue, 'Burletta and the Early Nineteenth-Century English Theatre', 49.

<sup>74</sup> The Theatrical Observer (7 December 1826).

<sup>75</sup> Shepherd, 'The Relationship between Music, Text and Performance in English Popular Theatre, 1790–1840', 124 and 264.

never Part', the perpetual darkness signal his imminent arrival. The glossalalic quality of this moving disorder projects the sense of scenic remonstrance to an astonished audience. The letters that Vanderdecken tries to have sent home, addressed to family long dead, to places long gone; his invisible cloak (allowing him spectral access to his hapless victims); and the 'fatal death-book' (full of hieroglyphics) where Lestelle will be forced to sign herself into marriage with the man-monster speaks of a landscape of secrets, concealment and deception.

Contractual exchange; communication through exploding letters; the Dutchman having to enter into contract with Rockalda to land ashore; the hated lawyer von Bummel – the sense of a deferral of openness and honest contact is everywhere. Natural familial trust is desacralized, Vanderdecken's incestuous eyes fixed on Lestelle, who during the course of the drama turns out to be his great-granddaughter. In the context of being forcibly excommunicated – of not being able to find one's home – surfaces strip away. Everything uncovers meaning. The betrayal of familial trust takes on biblical proportions. The very stones cry out:

Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul. For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it. Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2: 10-14<sup>76</sup>

In the end, the Dutchman confronts the ultimate transgression of the State, the ultimate cutting-off in terms of being delivered to the waters of Truth: state-run emigration. Expatriating the so-called 'redundant population' became an increasingly argued-for proposition in the 1820s. Much of this came on the back of surging Malthusianism (Essay on the Principle of Population, 1798), the emergence of the theories of Edward Gibbon Wakefield and groups including the Colonial Reformers and London Emigration Committee. Such ardent deportation advocates as R. J. Wilmot Horton, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1822 to 1828, proposed state relief in the form of what anti-emigrationists such as Tory radical William Cobbet, Michael Thomas Sadler or reformer Rowland Hill viewed as a policy of export: the export of paupers and social ills (see Plate 15).

<sup>76</sup> The Old Testament. The Authorized or King James Version of 1611 (London, 1996).





Plate 15: An anti-emigration print by George Cruikshank, 'Blessings of Emigration to the Cape', the captions using words from a song by melodramatist Charles Dibdin 'All among the Hottentots Capering ashore'; Royal Commonwealth Society, Africa miscellanea, RCMS 113.

In terms of the pragmatics of the political economy, outcasting and state banishment did not seem a bad idea at the time of the great white diaspora of the early century. From the beginning, especially around the time of the Emigration Report in 1826–7, the Cape of Good Hope seemed perfect for the undesirable elements of national life.<sup>77</sup> In an act of colonial dislocation, the vulnerable would be sent to territories without interiors (where the mainland was still relatively uncharted). They would be set loose upon the moving chaos of the sea. Their home would be aquatic, solitary; and like Vanderdecken and Lestelle, their banishment would last forever.

We shall not meet again; over the wave  
Our ways divide, and yours in straight and endless,  
But mine is short and crooked to the grave:

<sup>77</sup> For a detailed account of assisted migration see H. J. M Johnson, *British Emigration Policy, 1815–1830: 'Shovelling out Paupers'* (Oxford, 1972).



Yet what of these dark crowds amid whose flow  
 I battle like a rock, aloof and friendless,  
 Are not their generations vague and endless  
 The waves, the strides, the feet on which I go?  
 Roy Campbell<sup>78</sup>

This aquatic element in the Dutchman is interesting: water and madness, as Foucault and others have shown, have long been linked in the European imagination. The early fifteenth-century trope of the Ship of Fools, the Stultifera Navis (a historical reality in the Renaissance), sailing from town to town with cargoes of madmen resurfaced in the phenomenon of the nineteenth-century convict hulk (decommissioned warships moored off prominent ports in England as holding centres for prisoners awaiting transportation). The trope rears its head again via the legend of the Flying Dutchman, now modified to suit the cultural politics of the radical anti-emigrationist movement. Searching for reason, searching for home amidst a half-real, half-imaginary geography the emigrant, like the deranged Vanderdecken, is cast to the uncertainty of fate, to the vengeful waters of unreason. Foucault puts it like this:

Confined on a ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is delivered to the river with its thousand arms, the sea with its thousand roads, to the great uncertainty external to everything. He is a prisoner in the midst of what is freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is a Passenger par excellence: that is: the prisoner of passage.<sup>79</sup>

The Flying Dutchman, awash in the vast mixing of the sea, is condemned never to arrive. The (oceanic) break between 'over here' and 'over there', indeed, cannot be navigated. Losing anchor, in this sense, means becoming a prisoner of passage, cast adrift on a floating expanse of stammering signs. In this sea between reason and unreason, though you scream at the top of your lungs, you cannot signify above the scenographic commotion. In any case, you enunciate without meaning. Amidst the swirls, you speak only to yourself – delirious vocalisations of a lost utopia – until you grow silent. The sense of not being able to translate the 'over

<sup>78</sup> From the poem *Tristan da Cunha* (1930) in F. Carey Slater, ed., *The New Centenary Book of South African Verse* (London: Longman, Green & co., 1945), 178.

<sup>79</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 9. German criminologist, Nicolas Julius lists ten convict hulks for England in 1828 (two each off Portsmouth, Chatham and Woolwich, one each in Deptford, Sheerness, Lipnor and Plymouth) collectively holding some 3,360 souls; see Nicolas Heinrich Julius, *Volesungen über die Gefängnis-Kunde, oder über die Verbesserung der Gefängnisse* (Berlin, 1828), 42.

there', of not being able to make the crossing on this prisoner ship related to the Dutchman's mad raging against the south-easter off Table Bay, the South African landscape flitting in and out of view. Here was the glossalalic condition of being trapped in a vast, shifting medium, of being detained amidst the dark seas of translation. Interned in this world of hyper-signification, melodrama, in terms of representing or mediating the sense of the other, is frustrated. Its almost-sense, its 'over there' barely comes into view.

In the Dutchman, this state of being restrained by what is freest (by the flows of the most civilised nation) emerged alongside what we might call a liquefaction of the 'freest' element in melodrama – music. As we have seen, music's pervasive and fluid texture in melodrama always carried a persecutory or coercive function. Theatre legislation, to recap, decreed the perpetual presence of this surging subdiscourse. As the heightened vocalisations of the actors crossed over from proscenium to auditorium, so the orchestra, more than ever in the Dutchman, filled up this viscous space between interlocutor and spectator. It provided the medium through which the actor's musicalized diction passed. At exactly the historical moment of the sinking of the orchestral pit – the submerging of instruments beneath the stage – music took on the quality of an undercurrent holding the actors afloat.<sup>80</sup> In the absence of speech (of linguistic direction), music steered their states of mind and movement. This heaving modality, under the boards of the stage, brings to mind the obvious example of Wagner's Der fliegende Holländer. Music took on an environmental property, a feeling of drenching the actors in sound – washing over and oppressing them (as when Senta gives herself to the sea in the opera's sublimation). Wagner wrote about this in his Art for the Future (1850):

In the orchestra, that living body of immensely various harmony, the individual order is given an inexhaustible wellspring of, as it were, artistic-human natural elements by way of support. The orchestra is, so to say, the ground of endless general feeling, out of which the individual feeling of the single actor can grow to its utmost extent: it replaces somewhat the stark, immovable floor of the actual stage with a soft, gently flowing, yielding, impressionable, ethereal surface whose immeasurable bottom is the sea of feeling itself.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Karl Schinkel's sunken pit for the orchestra at the Berlin Schauspielhaus (1821) anticipated Wagner's Festspielhaus at Bayreuth (1876) with its mystischer Abgrund ('mystic chasm').

<sup>81</sup> Richard Wagner, 'Art for the Future', Piero Weiss, ed., Opera: A History in Documents (Oxford, 2002), 201–11, 209. Nautical metaphors occur repeatedly when it comes to Wagner. Nietzsche, for example, famously wrote in his critique of the composer's decadence: 'For a long while Wagner's ship

Actual water, in fact, featured regularly in the nautical melodramas of the 1820s. The Olympic Theatre on Wych Street, a prominent West End venue for popular theatre was improvised from the remains of a French warship. (Bought from the Admiralty, the out-of-commission 'Ville de Paris' was modified to feature an elaborate line of horse heads running along the architrave, a tin roof kept out the rain, whilst the old deck served as the stage.<sup>82</sup>) In 1822, similarly, the Coburg Theatre built a 'marine saloon' to prepare audiences for the aquadramas on show in the main auditorium. The classic nautical melodrama of the age was The Siege of Gibraltar (Sadler's Wells, 1804), which anticipated titles like The Pilot (Adelphi, 1825) and Black Ey'd Susan (Surrey, 1829), featuring 8,000 cubic feet of water and 'real Men of War', built to scale by professionals at His Majesty's Dock Yards.<sup>83</sup> 'Water, nothing but water', the Age complained in 1827: 'There is a nautical burletta at the Adelphi, water at the Olympic (where a real ship appears, and rides proudly above the heads of the people in the pit, that they might fancy themselves in Mr Brunel's tunnel [under the Thames]), and another at the Coburg!'<sup>84</sup>

To lose oneself in this aquatic world, in other words, was to find one's sense of self surrounded in music. The clipped precision of words no longer could be spoken or understood. The super-conductive quickness of the logos – the direct message – was still the only way out, but was always deferred until the last minute. Voice recognition brings the hero, Lieutenant Mowdrey, to the aid of Lestelle in the final 'dreadful abyss' scene of the Dutchman. Words also eventually defeat Vanderdecken. Sworn to silence by Rockalda, he breaks his vow in the final dénouement after a terrific fight with Mowdrey: 'Mortal, die! [Thunder.] Ah, what have I done! [He displays bodily agony.] I have spoken! [Music]'.<sup>85</sup> Sinking into the stage with his mystic book amidst red fire, straightforward syntax has revealed him; whereas music, on the other hand, has been his invisible cloak, his medium of seducing Lestelle, his means of announcing himself (his leitmotif) and the element

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sailed happily along its course. No doubt about it, along it Wagner sought his highest goal – What happened? An accident. The ship dashed into a reef; Wagner ran aground. The reef was Schopenhauer's philosophy; Wagner had stuck fast on a contrary view of the world.... At last, a way out dawned on him; what if he were to interpret the reef on which he had been wrecked as the goal, the hidden intention, the actual purpose of his journey? To be wrecked here, this was also a goal. Bene navigavi cum naufragium feci [I was sailing correctly when I was shipwrecked]'; see Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Case of Wagner', Weiss, ed., Opera: A History, 223–30, 228.

<sup>82</sup> Moody, Illegitimate Theatre in London, 31.

<sup>83</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama: 1660–1900 (Cambridge, 1976), 42.

<sup>84</sup> The Age III/34 (9 December 1827), 214a.

<sup>85</sup> Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', 47.

which will now consign him (literally, in that his body will seem musical) to the 'unfathomed darkness'.

This sense of the body being moved elsewhere amidst red fire, outside the scene of speech, into the waters between intelligibility and silence, runs through melodramatic discourse. The dark, drifting soundscape becomes, as Brooks puts it, 'meaning enacted upon the body itself', covering, smothering and weighing it down.<sup>86</sup> Such a scenario had been played out literally in the first South African melodrama on record, Eyre's The Caffres; or, Buried Alive, where the natives fasten Clara to a stake on the beach to be drowned by the rising tide. Being submitted to the deep involves the acceptance, as the preface to an 1818 edition of Samuel Arnold's Woodman's Hut (Drury Lane, 1814) put it, that 'the not so nicely marked' expressions of music would 'supply the place of language'. Displacing language, music becomes the sounding residue when speech is no longer possible, as when it inundates the opening scene of the Dutchman. While Rockalda condemns Vanderdecken to music-speak, an 'Invisible Chorus' chants: 'That instant ocean's flood/ consigns thee to despair'. His body plays out this exit into liquid madness: 'Thunder - Vanderdecken takes up his death-flag and retraces his steps amid the waves - he ascends in blue fire as the scene closes'.<sup>87</sup>

The historical place of music - its persecutory function - in the context of a stage form adrift in 'illegitimacy' has been lost. Scores were too ephemeral for them to be published. Given the innumerable house-styles and paucity of evidence, we have little sense of what the Dutchman actually sounded like. Of course, we could speculate on endless chains of diminished chords, spine-tingling string tremoli, brief four- or eight-bar action sequences, dramatic pauses for operatic filler or the clichéd interludes of strophic song (see Appendix 2). But our lack of evidence, in the case of the Dutchman, need not evince an admission of failure. Our straining to hear into the

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<sup>86</sup> Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (New Haven and London, 1995), xi.

<sup>87</sup> Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', 11. In melodrama, even when it appears to have a positive influence, music sustains this undercurrent of coercion, as when the wild man is civilised aurally and allows himself to be guided away on a lead in Orson and Valentine; or when Emmeline's flageolet prevents Frankenstein's monster from dashing her child from summit of a volcano in Henry Milner's The Man and the Monster; or, the Fate of Frankenstein (Coburg, 1826). Another good example occurs in Moncrieff's The Cataract of the Ganges, the music for which was supplied by T. Hughes (8 September 1829, Astley's Amphitheatre). This was a story dealing with female infanticide in the Gujarat. While real water inundates the stage in the final act, the piece opens on the aftermath of a Hindu-Muslim lakeside battle alongside 'music expressing the wounds of the wounded and dying'; see Shepherd, 'The Relationship between Music, Text and Performance in English Popular Theatre', 192. The bill can be found in The British Library at Playbills171.

distance – our near-deafness to lost music and discarded scores – seems entirely appropriate to the obscure terms and indistinct discourse of the narrative. Weaving all its uncertainties into the ill-defined seascapes of the story, music (this play of sound and silence) has always been instrumental in the representation of empire. Music's omni-directionality – its circuit of presence and absence – runs through and across the imperial stage in ways that go beyond the desire – so often written and talked about – to see and control. Empire, just as much as it is ordered by the scopic, is structured by the invocatory drive: the desire to prevent, allow and extract sound. Within such an acoustic, early nineteenth-century representations of South Africa – the Caffre and Dutchman – unravel: not only as visual, but as phonic colonisations of space, auralities of passage. As Vanderdecken descends into the deep, so his world shifts from the clarity of speech through the music of indistinctness to the silence of claustration: a transmutation (making mute) taking place. In all this, there is a sense of the whole ground of South Africa moving, irresolutely, in an aural space. Driven from home and forced into a life of 'intruding and searching and managing', the imperial wanderer – though he is fated with inordinate, quasi-demonic power – must cross over into this dark modality beyond words, beyond mere seeing. Shored on each side by babbling and muteness, loquacity and voicelessness, logorrhoea and aphonia, unconstrained noise and constrained silence – within such a melodramatic vocality – the imperial period of our history begins.



## The Sontag-Malibran Stereotype



Plate 16. Hippolyte Delaroche, *Portrait of Henrietta Sontag* (1831). Oil on canvas. 73 x 60 cm. By permission of the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.



Plate 17. Eugène Delacroix, *L'Amoureuse au piano; Sketch of Malibran* (1827-30). Brush, brown wash. 220 x 170. By permission of Louis-Antoine Prat.

The word female (femina) seems to derive its etymology from the word family (familia) since woman is the common centre of all families, the source of the generations of men, and the universal link of human beings. She gives life, and she leads to death; her purity is the great support of morality, and the very ground-work of society; and her profligacy enervates the courage of men, and depraves the morals of the community. Possessing equally the power of good and evil, of love and hatred, of pleasure and pain, she becomes the *vis insita*, the regulator, and the perturbing force in the whole system of human nature ... a being so feeble is, even from the very debility of her organisation, more liable to adopt every impression, to lend herself to all the sensations of the heart and mind, and to increase their energy and elevation by means of her exquisite sensibility.

From this endless pliability of the female character, and the imitative quality annexed to it, as well as that extreme versatility

which complies with every modification of manners, arises a contradictory creature, which is incapable of definition, and distinct discrimination. With women every thing is easy, variable, fleeting.

Étienne de Jouy (ethnologist, hermit, former political prisoner and librettist of Rossini's Guillaume Tell)<sup>1</sup>

### Making ends meet

Just before two o'clock on the afternoon of 30 May 1829 there was a rush at the doors of the Argyll Rooms, a suite of four spacious apartments on 246 Regent Street, in central London. Carriages drew up along the arcade (John Nash's recent design), while attendants hustled up and down the pavement making way for their employers. Most of the fashionables raining down on the entrance were women who, having paid their ten shillings and sixpence at the gate, had their coats removed as they climbed the stairs to the main chamber. Those who had picked up advance copies of La Belle Assemblée for June had stolen a march on their rivals, entering the Argyll's strange parallelogram-shaped concert room in short-sleeved rose satin dresses à la Circassienne. Convent crosses and cordons of embroidered flowers were de rigueur for the upcoming season. If brave, one might even try a headdress in rose crape adorned with ostrich feathers. The hall's boxes and parterre were already overflowing. Listening to their conversation, one might overhear talk of Turner's views of England and Wales, which were exhibiting around the corner in the Egyptian Hall on 22 Piccadilly.<sup>2</sup> The less fortunate were considering refunds at the door and the long return home for want of proper seating. In the bustle, hardly anyone noticed the giant mythological figures, somewhat 'discreditably painted', adorning the walls of the 713-seat venue.<sup>3</sup>

The Times reported of the second concert that the room was 'so exceedingly crowded that it was found necessary to accommodate some of the company with

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<sup>1</sup> Victor-Joseph Étienne de Jouy, 'Moral Condition and the Influence of Women in Society', lead article in The Athenaeum 12 (4 March 1828), 177–8.

<sup>2</sup> See The Atlas 4/160 (7 June 1829), 381a. When Mendelssohn visited Turner's exhibition, he dismissed the art as 'the most hideous smearing (greulichste Schmierereien)'; see Todd, Mendelssohn: A Life in Music, 209

<sup>3</sup> James Elmes' Annals of the Fine Arts (1820) included an informative account of the building (numbered 240–252 Regent Street), erected in 1818 to house the Royal Harmonic Institution. The grand concert-room was described as 'a parallelogram, elongated at one end by the orchestra, and at the other end by four tiers of boxes. The side walls of this saloon are decorated by fluted pilasters of the Corinthian order, and the apertures to the orchestra and boxes are terminated by four majestic columns of the same description. The cornice is ornamented by modillions, the ceiling arched, forming the segment of a circle, and enriched in octagonal [sic] Mosaic panels, and with large embossed flowers in each panel'; quoted in Robert Elkin, Royal Philharmonic: The Annals of the Royal Philharmonic Society (London, 1947), 21.

seats in the orchestra'.<sup>4</sup> Whether this measure was 'necessary' or not, seating ladies amongst the players had a striking visual effect. Had the critic recalled his review of Giuseppe de Begnis' benefit on Thursday morning, 21 May, he would have remembered that this arrangement was no mere emergency measure. On that day too, the Italian basso buffo had given a concert at which 'a great number of ladies [had] sat amidst the performers in the orchestra'. An explanation suggested itself: 'the coup d'oeil from thence to the pit, which was almost exclusively occupied by ladies dressed in the gayest attire of the season, and wearing satin hats of various colours, ornamented with flowers, was of the most picturesque description that can well be imagined'.<sup>5</sup> By 30 May, nine days after the experiment was first tried, the practice of adding delicate female touches to a traditionally male space had been more or less established.

This was the fourth in a series of 'Grand Morning Concerts' hosted by the publisher, proprietor of the establishment, music seller, ex-bass and principal shareholder of the 'Regent's Harmonic Institution', Thomas Welsh. Four weeks previously, Welsh would never have dreamt of such overcrowding or such a phalanx of fashion in his chambers. The forty-eight-year-old castrato, Velluti, considered sometime a creature of pity, sometime of admiration, operated a singing academy out of the Argyll Rooms in 1829. The 'shadow with lorn eyes', as a poet in the Examiner recently called him,<sup>6</sup> was probably on board with the proprietor right from the planning stages of the series. The band they put together, now filing into the room, was made up of members of the Philharmonic, the Ancient Concert and disaffected members of the King's Theatre orchestra. Many of this last group had recently been fired in a pay dispute. Led by violinist Franz Cramer and 'conducted' by George Smart, they were to be reckoned with. For the 30 May's star-studded performance, Velluti had signed the twenty-year-old Felix Mendelssohn to make his performing debut in London, playing Weber's Concert-Stück for piano and orchestra (op. 79), a piece that would become one of Liszt's warhorses; the Belgian violinist and future husband of Malibran, Charles de Bériot, to play variations of his own composition; Mademoiselle Blasis to sing a Pacini aria and duet with Alberico

<sup>4</sup> See The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 2 (1820), 385 and Morning Herald (1 June 1829), 3f. The critic's remarks appear in The Times 13,929 (1 June 1829), 2c.

<sup>5</sup> The Times 13,921 (22 May 1829), 3f. On this occasion, Malibran and Sontag provided a foretaste of what was to come at the Argyll Rooms by singing a duet by Mercadente, the orchestral parts having been arranged by Alexander Lee; see The Courier 11,701 (20 May 1829), 4a.

<sup>6</sup> The Examiner 914 (7 August 1825), 495b.

Curioni (the tenor who would create Orombello in Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda*, 1833); two new German singers on the scene, Rosner and Amalia Schütz, to sing arias in their native language; and the sensation of the season, Maria Malibran, to sing a piece composed for her by Bériot, and, at the concert's conclusion, a 'grand duet' alongside her great rival, the Prussian soprano Henriette Sontag.

The engagement of Sontag for all four of Velluti's concerts (11, 15, 22 and 30 May) was the real coup of Welsh's series. The German siren had taken time off a hectic schedule, probably to care for a child she had borne in secret towards the end of 1828 (the father was Count Rossi, Sardinian ambassador to the Hague). The official version of the scandalous story, covered over in the press because Rossi faced a shameful disinheritance, was that Sontag had slipped on a cherry-stone in her boudoir. Reports suggested they had been married in secret on 3 May 1827, the count having obtained a cabinet order from George IV to indemnify his union with a minor.<sup>7</sup> Rumours ran wild as to the truth of her situation. 'She no longer has such a pretty waist', Malibran jibed on 8 September.<sup>8</sup> Even as the German Nightingale reappeared in Paris at the Théâtre Italien on 29 January 1829, she soon receded into obscurity after a showdown with Malibran's *Tancredi* on 31 March 1829. Versions of her plight, meanwhile, were elaborated to incorporate orange peels rather than cherry-stones. Orange-selling, of course, suggested prostitution. And if Sontag was oh-so-promiscuous, then Rossini's music had been her pimp, Gautier once deriding the maestro as 'an orange tree spontaneously producing its round, golden fruit'.<sup>9</sup>

Since her final appearance in a Paris production of *Tancredi*, perhaps to escape attention, Sontag had used some of her free time to make an advance tour to the English capital. This was already some weeks before the commencement of what Ayrton at the *Harmonicon* called a 'fast and loose engagement' in 1829 with Pierre Laporte, the co-manager of the King's Theatre. On arrival, according to the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, she found that Laporte's drawcard for the 1829

<sup>7</sup> 'There was, however, a difficulty remaining – she is a minor, and the consent of her mother and her guardian was necessary. The mother had no objection, but the guardian, M. Kemowsky, refused his consent. The Ambassador has, therefore, applied to the King, and by a Cabinet order, the consent is declared unnecessary'; see *The Times* (14 June 1827), 3a.

<sup>8</sup> In a letter addressed to her husband; see April Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran, Diva of the Romantic Age* (London, 1987), 127.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *The Atlas* 146 (1 March 1829), 137b: '[Sontag] has just recovered the effects of her last decadence (a slight roulade down the stairs, caused it is said, by treading on a piece of orange-peel), and is singing Rode's variations as gaily as ever' (Catalani had popularised the singing of these violin variations). For Gautier's words of 1852, see Janet Johnson, 'The Musical Environment in France', Peter Bloom, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz* (Cambridge, 2000), 36.

season, Malibran, was not in full cry. Engaged as prima donna assoluta for the season, Malibran had not made a good journey across the Channel and opinion had cooled after her début as Rosina in Rossini's Barbiere on 21 April.<sup>10</sup> So when Laporte learnt of Sontag's arrival, he tracked her down and engaged her for a run of concerts he was putting together with Nicolas Bochsa. In the contract he presented to her, Laporte sought to close a deal that would prevent her appearance at any venue other than his own. He was so confident of securing her compliance in this that he even began to advertise her début for 28 April 1829 (in the light blue luxury of the King's Concert Room, a newly refurbished chamber attached to his main auditorium).<sup>11</sup> The move was premature: Velluti and Welsh had made a counter offer behind his back with terms favourable enough to seal her acceptance, delay her entrance on the King's main stage until 5 May (as Angelina in Cenerentola) and keep her (for the moment) from Laporte's jealous grasp.<sup>12</sup>

In the wake of the Sontag intrigue, Welsh's concert series attracted widespread publicity – not all of it complimentary. In the Harmonicon, Ayrton complained that 'the music selected is, for the greater part, of that insipid, mawkish

<sup>10</sup> Sontag left Paris on 2 April. For her début, see Parke, Musical Memoirs; Comprising an Account of the General State of Music in England, 272. Laporte engaged Malibran at the King's Theatre on 75 guineas a night. The following evening (22 April) 'Otello was introduced to the most crowded (though we cannot say fashionable) audience we have witnessed this season [because of] the much-talked-of Malibran'; see The London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belle Lettres, Arts and Sciences (25 April 1829), 276.

<sup>11</sup> The Harmonicon devoted a whole paragraph to the venue: 'This room, the finest in London for music, had been altered, repaired, and fitted up. The orchestra is now stationed where the royal boxes were placed, and two semi-circular rows of small boxes have been built at the opposite end. One half of the floor has been raised into an amphitheatre, which with the other half if filled with cross benches, but there are no side ones, for want whereof the appearance of the room suffers materially. The predominant clothing is light blue, the ornamental part being executed in a cheap theatrical manner, and very French. The whole is illuminated by one lustre, suspended from the centre of the ceiling, which is decorated in good taste, and diffusing an agreeable light. The orchestra is much too perpendicular, and wants depth in the lower part. The proscenium also, which is a flimsy affair, gives it more the appearance of a portable stage, than is usual or becoming a concert-room'; see The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 145.

<sup>12</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 10 (1828–30), 301 and The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 140. Reports of Sontag's 5 May debut were contradictory. The Harmonicon found her voice 'much improved in quality, having acquired more fullness, become more mellow'; see Harmonicon 7 (1829), 15. As a foil to this, Harriet Countess Granville, who attended this performance, wrote to the Duke of Devonshire the following day that she was 'thinner than anybody I ever saw, looking as if she had cried her eyes out, sang beautifully sometimes, sometimes false, which she never used. There is more effort, weaker in health. She has had a baby, but she is married and has been so two years. She has sworn to conceal it, but trod upon a peach-stone, was known to accoucher, and therefore now is obliged to confide the truth to a few. Madame Appony [this is Madame la Comtesse d'Appony, the wife of the Austrian ambassador in Paris to whom Chopin dedicated the op. 27 nocturnes] has received her since with the highest honour, the French ditto. The husband she will not name because of her oath, but nobody doubts it being Count Clam. The mystery necessary because old Clam has promised to shoot himself if his son marries her'; see Harriet Granville, Letters of Harriet Countess Granville 1810–45, ed. F. Leveson Gower, 2 vols (London, 1894), II, 40.



kind, which the singers, aided by a few tasteless people of influence, are at present forcing, not down the throats, but into the ears of such of the public that are passive, and allow themselves to be drugged by the wretched stuff of Nicolini, Bonfichi, Mosca, Pacini, &c. &c.'. <sup>13</sup> Richard Bacon at the Quarterly Musical Magazine disagreed in retrospect, arguing that 'the concerts [Welsh] gave were by far the finest of the season, whether the variety and elevation of the talent employed, the solid excellence of the compositions performed, or the superiority of the orchestra be considered. The public heard there Sontag, Malibran, and Velluti, with the richest combination of talent in every department.... While the concerts at the opera concert room entailed a loss upon the proprietor, Mr Welch's [sic] increased in attraction and success'. <sup>14</sup> Unusually for morning concerts, every one of Velluti's events leading up to the 30 May had been packed out.

The third and fourth concerts in Velluti's series were almost perfect replicas of each other. On both 22 and 30 May, the audience was large and predominantly female. There were minor differences. On 30 May, Rosner soothed the growing demand for 'the authentic' by singing Don Ottavio's 'Il mio tesoro' from Don Giovanni as 'Thränen vom Freud getrocknet'. This was in contrast to his London début the previous Friday when he had performed a scena from Der Freischütz. At the later concert, Velluti was 'in charming voice' and sang what the Times described as 'a beautiful composition' ('Ah che forse' by Nicolini) 'with spirit as well as delicacy above all praise'. (Conservative critics still apparently found space to commend him.) It was also Sontag rather than Malibran who rendered the week's highly embellished aria by Mercadante ('Del mio pianto') and 'performed new miracles'. This time, Mendelssohn replaced a young German pianist, Schultz, who had played a set of Henri Herz variations on 'Ma Fanchette est charmante' from Boieldieu's Angéla (1814). Felix preferred a work that the Times described as 'a description of a soldier's farewell to his mistress'. As expected, 'the young professor' was a revelation, not only producing 'a powerful effect' in the march's crescendo, but mastering all four of Weber's movements entirely from memory, an unheard-of feat in 1829. At this concert, Velluti sang alongside Sontag in 'Questo cor' from Rossini's first opera Demetrio e Polibio, 1812).

<sup>13</sup> The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 145.

<sup>14</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 10 (1828-30), 301-2.

Its preceding attractions notwithstanding, the draw card on both afternoons was the final item: Malibran contra Sontag. On 22 May, they performed Semiramide's 'Ebben, a te: ferisci'; on 30 May, Tancredi's 'Lasciami, non t'ascolto', the tempo d'attacco from the Act Two scena, 'Fiero incontro'.<sup>15</sup> (A week later, at Velluti's benefit at the Argyll Rooms on 9 June, the Semiramide duet was featured again.) Their final appearance on Regent Street, suitably enough, occurred at Welsh's benefit on 15 June. This was a dazzling concert: both numbers from Semiramide and Tancredi combined to bring the season's events to a climax.<sup>16</sup> These two duets were the stratospheric showpieces of 1829 both in Paris and now London.

### Mutual pasts

A lavish display of dress, a blaze of candlelight, perfumes; so many pretty arms, and lovely shoulders; bouquets, the entrancing melody of Rossini's music, Ciceri's paintings! I am carried right out of myself!  
Stendal via Uzeri's Travels<sup>17</sup>

The great Sontag-Malibran engouement of 1829 dated back to 27 January in Paris. Sontag had reappeared at the Salle Favart as Rosina, a role suited to her ravishing soprano-sfogato and ease of execution. The winter had been particularly bleak at the Théâtre Italien and many Italophiles had deserted their time-honoured watering-hole in despair of ever finding sustenance. That evening, Malibran could be seen in her loge on the third tier. During the interval, according to one anecdote, Rossini appeared on stage and announced that he had left Malibran in tears in her box despairing that she would ever match such perfection and purity of execution.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Reviews of these concerts appear in the The Times (23 May 1829), 5c; The Times (1 June 1829), 2c and The Morning Journal 9,634 (1 June 1829), 3d.

<sup>16</sup> For these benefits, see The Courier 11,719 (10 June 1829), 3c and The Courier 11,724 (16 June 1829), 3c. Duet performances in London included Moscheles' benefit (8 May, King's Concert Room, 'Ebben, a te: ferisci'), Anderson's benefit (13 May, Argyll Rooms, 'Ebben, a te: ferisci'), Laporte's benefit (15 May, King's Theatre, Tancredi), Fourth Grand Concert (30 May, Argyll Rooms, 'Lasciami, non t'ascolto'), Eighth Philharmonic Society Concert (8 June, Argyll Rooms, 'Ebben, a te: ferisci'), Velluti's benefit (9 June, Argyll Rooms, 'Ebben: a te ferisci'), Welsh's benefit (15 June, Argyll Rooms, both duets), Sontag's benefit (18 June, Tancredi, King's Theatre), opera performance (20 June, Tancredi, King's Theatre), Ella's benefit (24 June, 'Ebben, a te: ferisci', Mrs Henshaw's), and more opera performances (13 and 14 July, Tancredi, King's Theatre).

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Stendhal, Scarlet and Black, trans. Margaret R.B. Shaw (London, 1953), 302, a novel set in 1829, and written as 'a chronicle of the nineteenth century' between November 1828 and the summer of 1830.

<sup>18</sup> Anon, A Memoir of the Countess de Rossi (Madame Sontag) (London, 1850?), 37.

Actress Katherine Bauer remembered Malibran whispering, 'My God! Why does she sing so beautifully!' as Sontag delivered her part.<sup>19</sup>

Rumours began to circulate amongst the dilettanti suggesting that Sontag and Malibran had been brought together at a private concert. Some said this had been organised by Condesa de Merlin, the Havanese melomane of Creole extraction, along with Malibran's chaperone, Madlle. Naldi (whose husband had been killed nine years earlier in Paris when a prototype pressure-cooker shown to him by Malibran's father exploded in his face) and her Spanish countryman Mathieu Orfila (a talented singer, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in Paris and the world's leading toxicologist). A plot had apparently been hatched at Merlin's salon, where Tancredi's 'Fiero incontro' was called for unexpectedly: '[The pair] stood gazing at each other with a look of distrust and confusion; but at length the closing chord of the introduction roused their attention, and the duo commenced'. Merlin remembered that at the final cadence 'they joined hands, and, inclining affectionately towards each other, they interchanged the kiss of friendship with all the ardour and sensibility of youth'.<sup>20</sup> Others would speculate (inaccurately) that Fétis had effected their first reconciliation after unpleasant scenes of rivalry at the King's Theatre. He remembered how he had first accompanied them at the piano in Semiramide's 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' at Lord Saltoun's house: 'It was the first time those two voices had rung together; and the effect of this [duet] was indescribable, for both the two great singers, each striving to out-sing the other, severally attained a pitch of perfection higher than any they had reached before'.<sup>21</sup> Another implausible account had the wit, bon vivant and Russian consul general, Chevalier George de Benkhause, introducing them on the turf of Epsom Races over champagne and Gunter's ice-cream: 'They gazed one instant at each other, another instant and their hands were clasped, and a tear glistened in the eye of the daughter of the South, who was passion's essence, whilst a deeper tint mantled the cheek of the more reserved German.... Thus for the first time met the

<sup>19</sup> For more on Bauer's memoirs (1883-4); see Fitzlyon, Maria Malibran, Diva of the Romantic Age, 68.

<sup>20</sup> Mercédès Merlin, Memoirs of Madame Malibran, 2 vols (London, 1840), I, 54.

<sup>21</sup> This performance was far from the first. Fétis was in London in 1829 to ply his trade as a music critic and piano accompanist. His report describes this performance as having taken place at Lord Saltoun's house in London for the benefit of John Ella. (Ella directed the Società Lirica or 'Saltoun Club' here, a group of aristocrat amateurs who met to perform together.) The story that Fétis effected a reconciliation between Sontag and Malibran after nasty incidents at the King's Theatre in 1829 is wishful thinking. Ella's 1829 benefit featuring 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' actually took place on 24 June at Mrs Henshaw's house at 26 Wimpole Street; see the advertisement in The Athenaeum 81 (24 June 1829), 400c. See also Arthur Pougin, Marie Malibran: the Story of a Great Singer (London, 1911), 65.

two greatest musical geniuses of the age'.<sup>22</sup> Some said it was Rossini himself who had first played the keyboard introduction to 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' for them at some fashionable house. In the andante sostenuto, 'Giorno d'orror!', the story went, their voices 'united, or rather melted into one another with incomparable smoothness'. Moving into the tempo di mezzo – while Sontag was singing 'T'arresta. Oh Dio' – 'Rossini cried 'Oh! That was beautiful!' embraced them both and pushed them together, but Maria stepped back and Sontag turned away'.<sup>23</sup>

Contrasting though they were, these anecdotes carried similarities. First, it seemed important that some (generally male) figure lurked behind the pair's bringing together. Secondly, it seemed necessary that the singers' vocal relationship be mirrored physically. Theirs was an intense personal rivalry caught up in a circle of estrangement and reconciliation. Induced to pull apart, they would continually be brought together to embrace and make up. These scenes of intimacy and loathing, this back and forth movement, made for a dynamic that – like the *vocalismo d'agilità* that formed in their throats – was always in flux, always mobile.

Four months before Velluti's series in London, the love-hate relationship between Sontag and Malibran was finally staged for the public. The director of the Théâtre Italien, Émile Laurent, had already advertised them together for 15 January, but postponed their appearance repeatedly to fire expectation. Exactly a month later, on 15 February 1829, the *directeur-entrepreneur* finally bowed to public pressure. The occasion was his benefit, and he took the opportunity to double ticket prices to 24 francs. Later that year, the *Times* of London published a 'retrospect', recording that this date released an 'epidemic' in Paris.<sup>24</sup> At the dawn of modern cults of celebrity, such hype could never have been anticipated. The public divided into two camps. Three-fourths of the dilettanti and most of the fashionable world became committed Malibranistes; the remaining aristocrat savants, musicians and

<sup>22</sup> The Epsom Races began on 2 June, months after Sontag and Malibran first met. The anecdote described Lord Burghersh, Sir George Warrender, and De Beriot in Malibran's entourage, Rossi and de Benkhausen in Sontag's; see Julie de Marguerite, 'Souvenirs of the Opera in Europe', *Life of Henriette Sontag, Countess de Rossi with Interesting Sketches* (New York, 1852), 61–3, 63.

Mendelssohn also went to the races on 4 June, with his friend Goldschmidt; see the composer's diary for 1829 in M. Denecke Mendelssohn Collection, Bodleian Library, Oxford, pocket diaries g. 1–10.

<sup>23</sup> This story appears in Pontmartin's *Souvenirs d'un vieux melomane*; see Howard Bushnell, *Maria Malibran: A Biography of a Singer* (University Park, 1979), 88.

<sup>24</sup> This article involved a long discussion of 'engouement', and of which the English word infatuation conveys but a faint and imperfect idea. Instances of infatuation are known and seen in England in individuals only; it closely borders on insanity of mind, and amounts to a sudden but transient deprivation of reason. But the *engouement* of the Parisians is a sort of epidemic which attains a whole community; it is a magic spell'; see *The Times* (14 September 1829), 6e.

cognoscenti were Sontagists. In these early days, the papers favoured the 'koeniglichsaalkammersangerinn', as one journalist called her, whose throat was 'a veritable compendium of vocal fiorature [sic]': 'Sontag sang with that sort of aplomb which the consciousness of superior ability as a vocalist could not fail to give her, went through the part of Amenaïde, which seemed to have been almost purposely written for her clear and easy vocalization, with great success'.<sup>25</sup> A reporter for the Morning Chronicle who witnessed the Parisian spectacle enjoyed seeing Malibran in trousers: 'The crusader's garb is moreover extremely welcoming to her person; and her portraiture of the youthful hero is thus rendered in all respects a dramatic personation of the most engaging interest'. 'The prevailing light, graceful, and airy character of the music belonging to the part of Amenaïde recommend it no less as a favourable specimen of Mademoiselle Sontag's talents', the reviewer continued, 'than do different qualities recommend Tancredi for the display of Madame Malibran's'. He then braced for the opera's showpiece: 'the great gem of the performance is the duet 'Lasciami! – non t'ascolta', in which the voices of Madame Malibran and Mademoiselle Sontag blend together with a strain of the richest and most delicious melody'.<sup>26</sup>

Heated debates raged over Spanish cigarettes at the Café de Paris. Tempers frayed over ices at Tortoni's (another centre of Italophile dandyism). The great Rossini acolyte and critic Paul Scudo remembered a war so fierce 'between the imperious Juno and the blonde Venus that they could not remain together in the same room.... Their stupendous jealousy manifested itself by malicious cadenzas and rockets of sound ... which inflamed their hearers. Now it was the Trojans burst all bonds, and now the Greeks. The parterre rose and fell like the waves of the sea under the touch of the divinities of Olympus'. For Scudo, this clash of deities brought about

<sup>25</sup> This article noticed how Sontag was 'not so often guilty of the fault of pitching it below the note, in order to replace it afterwards, a vicious habit which has been visible since her return from London'; see translations of La Revue musicale 5 (1829), 102–3, in Bushnell, Maria Malibran: A Biography of a Singer, 89, and in The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 96. Evidence recurs in The Times (14 September 1829), 6f.

<sup>26</sup> The reviewer took the opportunity to cut both Malibran and Sontag down to size – perhaps to reinforce the idea of their mutual dependence: 'In all the duets, Madame Malibran has not equal success... in the second duet with Argirio, some want of agility and some feebleness of organ are betrayed in the second movement, 'Ecco la trombe', where the trumpet accompaniment is heard from without... [Sontag's] dramatic action and recitative are, it must be owned, liable to the ordinary reproach of languor; but some sparks of feeling, giving hope of better things, burst forth'; see The Morning Chronicle 18,639 (22 June 1829), 2e.



'the most glorious – the culminating epoch of the Italiens in Paris'.<sup>27</sup> The Salle Favart was revived.

Critics made it clear that since this first appearance in tandem, neither Malibran nor Sontag was sufficient enough to stir up excitement on her own. They needed each other. Malibran lacked Sontag's class, naiveté, flexibility and charm; Sontag lacked Malibran's volume, range, intelligence and drama. But together, each line of coloratura – both 'Fiero incontro' and 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' are intensely virtuosic – enhanced the effect of its blazing counterpart. At their London concerts, this 'twoness' – two voices singing two duets at two concerts – exuded a glorious symmetry. Twisting and circling within view of each other, one voice depended on the breath of another. Beneath, above or to the side of it, one duplicated and offset its twin. Critics remembered their singing as emblematic of the season.<sup>28</sup> As the Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review recalled:

This season – it was not Sontag – it was not Malibran – it was not both that would attract if they sung only single songs. 'The only thing going' was to hear them in the duets, 'Fiero incontro' from Tancredi, and 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' from Semiramide – and certainly the two was thus far right – a more perfect performance was never heard, and it is questionable whether any two voices ever went so well together, and whether any two singers ever sung with such generous rivalry, not to distinguish each to herself.<sup>29</sup>

Had they an eye for it, historians of opera would view these late 1820s performances as both fashionable and unfashionable. Fashionable, because this was the grand era of female doubling in Italian and French opera (Donizetti's Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth, 1829 or Anna Bolena, 1830; Meyerbeer's Robert le diable, 1831; Bellini's Norma, 1831). Unfashionable, because since Semiramide – on 20 October 1823 to be precise – Rossini had taken up his belongings, wife (or rather his wife had taken him) and departed Bologna for London and Paris.<sup>30</sup> Settling in the French capital, Rossini would tone down the canto fiorito at its peak in Semiramide apparently as an accommodation to the more declamatory manner of French singing.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Scudo, 'Henriette Sontag', in Life of Henriette Sontag, Countess de Rossi with Interesting Sketches (New York, 1852), 39–46, 42. In a classic piece of vitriol, Berlioz waded into Scudo and Rossini, who was 'this trimmer', 'this great abscess', with 'the air of a retired satyr [who] poses every evening on the Boulevard Italien, attended by Scudo and all the little Scudi who crawl about Paris'; see Hector Berlioz, Evenings in the Orchestra, trans. C. R. Fortescue (Harmondsworth, 1963), 335.

<sup>28</sup> The quotes and programmes are taken from the The Times (23 May 1829), 5c; The Times (1 June 1829), 2c and The Morning Journal 9,634 (1 June 1829), 3d.

<sup>29</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 10 (1828–30), 300.

<sup>30</sup> His wife, Isabella Colbran, earned a higher salary than he in Paris.

In the late 1820s, 'syllabication', a slowed down line, and a type of vocalisation placed forward in the mouth – *dans la masque* – began to replace the *con brio* Italianate melismas familiar in *Semiramide*. Yet, as if to counter 'Frenchification', a new mania for *canto di bravura* exploded from nowhere around 1829 – a conservative anti-Rossinian backlash led by singers. Vocalists in cosmopolitan centres increasingly began to introduce more roulades, arpeggios, trills and portamenti – particularly into the already ornate parts of vocal writing.<sup>31</sup> Even Pasta, the great 'immovable beauty' and *beau idéal* – Chorley hailed her as 'fierce, masterful, Oriental' – had turned her plain, noble style of the early 1820s into something florid by 1829.<sup>32</sup> In May of that year, Rossini was in Paris preparing for the August premiere of his last opera, *Guillaume Tell*; but across the channel the extracted duets of *Tancredi* and *Semiramide* were coming into their own – not so much in Venice at the time of their composition (both operas were written for La Fenice), but as products of 1829. No doubt this explains why 'Giorno d'orror!' (a conservative slow movement even in relation to its rival *Semiramide* duet equivalents) appears to historians as at once backward- and forward-looking. 'Paradoxically', as Heather Hadlock has noticed, 'Giorno d'orror!' points both to the past and 'towards the presence of lush two-soprano duets like Bellini's "Mira, o Norma" as a "special effect" in operas of the 1830s'.<sup>33</sup>

As if to underline the importance of 'Giorno d'orror!', and their sense of being-in-one, contemporaries and critics repeatedly imagined Sontag and Malibran singing from the same throat. The 16 May issue of the *Herald* – for example – printed that 'the principal attraction of [a King's Theatre evening concert] was a duetto by Rossini [from *Tancredi*], which was executed by Madlle. Sontag and Madame Garcia

<sup>31</sup> For more on trends in ornamentation at the time, see Austin Caswell, 'Mme Cinti-Damoreau and the Embellishment of Italian Opera in Paris: 1820–1845', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* XXVIII/3 (1975), 459–92.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Chorley, *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections*, 2 vols (London, 1862), I, 41. Even in 1829, Pasta's style of ornamentation was tame by Malibran's standards. Comparisons of the singers were frequently made. The 23 June 1828 issue of *Le Figaro* wrote that 'despite the depth of her acting and the power of her effects, despite the majesty of her poses and the sublime expression of her features, Mme Pasta would envy her young rival for her abandon, her artlessness, her freedom, which always makes something inspired of what she does, something unexpected, improvised. Possessing in addition a decidedly superior voice, Mme Malibran is capable of embellishing her singing with all the charm of the ornaments'; quoted in Bushnell, *Maria Malibran: A Biography of a Singer*, 75. 'Malibran has the unforeseen', Delacroix once recorded in his diary, 'her singing and her action changed from day to day'; quoted in Pougin, *Marie Malibran: the Story of a Great Singer*, 291–2. '[Pasta] was always present for herself on the stage', the painter wrote elsewhere, '[Malibran] forgot to find herself before a public'; quoted in Bushnell, *Maria Malibran: A Biography of a Singer*, 175.

<sup>33</sup> Heather Hadlock, 'Tancredi and Semiramide', in *The Cambridge Companion to Rossini*, ed. Emanuele Senici (Cambridge, 2004), 139–158, 151.

in the most delightful unison! (This was an impossibility that the Harmonicon satirised as a critical faux pas a few days later.)<sup>34</sup> The Athenaeum meanwhile, singled out 'Giorno d'error!', the Semiramide duet's cantabile a due, for praise:

After witnessing every species of vocal performance in this country, from the days of Mara in the year 1800 to the present period ... nothing has been heard so finished, so beautiful, or so interesting; in the immediate duet parts, every breath, every aspiration, was given so simultaneously and so perfectly, that the two voices seemed to be actuated by one person only.<sup>35</sup>

This one-person-only notion – this sense of bodies mingling – was defining. The dédoublement of the dark Spanish allure of Malibran with the tall flaxen-haired grace of Sontag piled fascination upon fascination for a culture taken up with the beautiful confusion of their voices.

### The power of song

For musicologists, a well-worn hermeneutic tactic at this point would involve 'The Music Itself'. One might point to the neo-classical conformism of 'Fiero incontro' or 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' to show how the female is hemmed in compositionally. Alternatively, one might summarise the plot of Tancredi or Semiramide, to show how the protagonista is contained within the narrative. (We are reminded of those anecdotes suggesting male authorship – Fétis, Benkhausen, or even Rossini supposedly masterminding their coming-together.) Otherwise, one might highlight the unbridled sensuality of the singing voice in performance so as to argue the opposite. As Sontag and Malibran become 'doubly Real', one might argue, so there is (female) resistance contra domestication.

My preference would be to argue that woman is nothing if not powerful here. This is not only because she is envoiced by her performance or that she takes flight in spite of the (male) composition. Rather, in a hard historical sense, Malibran and Sontag perform that composition themselves. Their ornaments do not merely decorate pauses or elaborate repeats in formulaic ways. Rather, they alter and extend

<sup>34</sup> The editor, William Ayton, reminded his readers that the Herald critic was 'a native of the emerald isle'; see The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 141. This particular Irishman came in for stick generally in 1829. The Times (probably Alsager) lambasted him at one point for lauding Sontag's 'polyphonic powers'; see report in The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 113.

<sup>35</sup> The Athenaeum 85 (10 June 1829), 379–80.

the (Rossinian) melody from the opening notes of their parts. As historical figures, they participate fully in the compositional act.

A piano score and the performance it related to exemplify the extent to which they controlled the weave of the text. 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' was imported from Paris to the King's Concert Room on Friday 8 May. This concert, for the benefit of Ignaz Moscheles, programmed the first squaring-off between Sontag and Malibran in London. The morning's programme featured Moscheles' own 'new grand symphony' (Symphony in C, op. 81) and a keyboard fantasia: 'Sir Walter Scott's favourite Strains of the Scottish Bards'. The Times of the following day attacked Moscheles for performing keyboard arrangements of what it assumed were Rossini highlights. The reviewer conceded, however, that the big attraction – Sontag's and Malibran's 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' – 'was listened to with great delight'.<sup>36</sup> Ayrton, at the Harmonicon, found himself in two minds as to the merits of the performance. He noted that Malibran had used this concert to perform 'not "Di tanti palpiti" properly so called, but what can only be considered as variations on it; and thus substituted her own tinsel for the sterling air, with a self-complacency that we never before saw equalled'. In Ayrton's formulation, the severity of the 'damage' done to Rossini's original was matched only by the extent of the overhaul done on 'the big attraction'. He could allow, on one hand, that the Semiramide duet had been sung 'with charming effect'. On the other, he could not help complaining that 'the last part of this was so altered by the concetti, that it was difficult to trace the author's notes'.<sup>37</sup>

In autumn, Moscheles published a piano reduction of the very same 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' that he had 'conducted' from the keyboard in May. Although not a full transcription, the score was probably based on this 1829 performance; perhaps even on a set of manuscript parts he had prepared for it. Prefaced by a brief arrangement of 'Crudel! Perche finora' from Mozart's Figaro, 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' dominated the second of a two-volume collection of 'dramatic fantasias' recreating memorable Malibran-moments for the piano-playing amateur. What makes this score valuable for modern research is an inscription prominently displayed on the title page: 'with the admired embellishments & cadences, as sung by Mad. Malibran'.<sup>38</sup> The volume's importance as a measure of the diva's 'ornamentation' is immediately recognisable. Beneath the concessions Moscheles made to meet the requirements of the bourgeois

<sup>36</sup> The Times 13,910 (9 May 1829), 6c.

<sup>37</sup> The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 146–7.

<sup>38</sup> Ignaz Moscheles, Gems à la Malibran, Book 2 (London, 1829).

pianist, these pages conceal glimpses of the lost voices of Maria Malibran and Henriette Sontag, creating – as it were – ‘in unison’.

Since these duets occurred, not at the opera, but in concert, Sontag and Malibran would have been liberated to act ‘themselves’. Attired in concert dress rather than ‘in costume’, they were free to be fully woman, not just to ‘remain in character’. Any seasoned opera-goer worth her salt would have been aware of the dramatic situation as the pair faced each other. Semiramide was frequently performed at the King’s Theatre in 1829 and many auditrices, no doubt, would have taken pleasure in filling out the missing operatic accoutrements in their imaginations. Arsace, represented en travesti by Malibran, has finally put an end to the amorous advances of Queen Semiramide (their love expressed in the Act One duet ‘Serbami ognor si fido’). Fortunately for Malibran’s character, the attempts by the Babylonian Queen to seduce him into marriage had been thwarted by the ghostly appearance of her late husband in the Act One finale. In the preceding recitative, Arsace has just revealed himself as her son, making clear his knowledge of her complicity in his father’s murder. Incest rears its ugly head in this scene of mother-child recognition – as the remorseful Babylonian queen pleads in the tempo d’attacco for him to kill her. This disturbing episode sets up a turning point in the plot. Events veer towards tragic resolution where Arsace will be led to commit matricide – in an Oedipal twist – in the finale’s ‘subterranean tomb’. Pressed into his mother’s arms in the duet’s andante ‘Giorno d’orror! E di contento!’, Arsace is wrapped together with Sontag in parallel thirds [Arsace si getta fra le di lei braccia, esso la stringe con trasporto; restano abbracciati]. Drawn into an acoustic circle, the singers express not so much the rapture of the maternal bond, as the moral dread of sexual desire for each other. The sonorous fabric binds soprano to contralto in a heady G major mix, where Friedrich Kittler’s words in Discourse Networks come to mind: ‘Romanticism is the discursive production of the Mother as the source of discursive production’. The identification of the Mother in this scene (Ma sei mia madre ancor) literally enacts what Kittler would call a ‘Romantic’ emergence in operatic history. A maternal voice reveals itself from within the plot; breaking into discourse – sensuous and dangerous – she has been made known.<sup>39</sup>

What is immediately striking about Moscheles ‘transcription’ is its key scheme. In Rossini’s original, the music divides into four keys – I am borrowing

<sup>39</sup> Kittler, Discourse-Networks 1800/1900, xii.



Basevi's somewhat anachronistic 'solita forma de' duetti' (two kinetic-static pairs divisible as tempo d'attacco-cantabile/tempo di mezzo-cabaletta): E-G/E-E.<sup>40</sup>

Moscheles' equivalent key scheme, by contrast, avoids tonal closure and is senseless in purely musical terms: F-G/G-E flat. (Rossini's already brief tempo di mezzo appears as somewhat nonsensical four-bar accompaniment figure in Moscheles' reduction). Since such transpositions cannot be justified in terms of ease of keyboard performance, it is likely they represent accommodations made for singers. Much more drastic alterations than these were normal in the performances of the day.

Transposition was an obvious way to bend to the requirements of the singer. The *Athenaeum* of 1829 reported that Sontag, for example, sung Rosina's ubiquitous 'Una voce poco fa' in G, 'a tone higher than written' (sic). According to one anecdote, Malibran transposed the same cavatina down a semitone. On 8 October of that year at the Birmingham Music Festival, the Spanish diva apparently stood through the orchestral introduction in F (the key that Jenny Lind preferred), whispered 'in E' (ironically the 'original' key) to the first violin, Charles Weichsel, and began her part accordingly.<sup>41</sup> In the music-lesson scene of the same opera, still playing Rosina, Malibran generally chose to interpolate 'a French Romance' or a Spanish bolero. When encored, she would sing an array of light French songs, momentarily transporting the audience – bizarrely – into the concert hall. Sontag, by contrast, followed Catalani's lead by interpolating a vocal transcription of Rode's violin variations into the same scene.<sup>42</sup> A more outrageous instance occurred when Malibran sang Bellini's 1834 version of *I Puritani* in an adaptation overseen by the composer himself. In this setting, Elvira's 'Son vergin vezzosa' ('I'm a charming virgin') was shifted down a minor third.<sup>43</sup> Returning to 1829: when Malibran took the

<sup>40</sup> For the debate over Abramo Basevi and form see, for example Harold S. Powers, "La solita forma" and "the uses of convention", in *Acta Musicologica* 59/1 (1987), 65–9; or Roger Parker, "Insolite forme", or Basevi's Garden Path", in *Leonora's Last Act* (Princeton, 1997), 42–60.

<sup>41</sup> For Sontag, see *The Athenaeum* 25 (18 April 1828), 395a. For Malibran, see *The Athenaeum* 103 (14 October 1829), 648. When Sontag made her London debut in 1828, she chose Rosina. To heighten suspense, Sontag's entrance was delayed, her balcony scene – where her whole form was obscured from view – being substituted by another. Instead she entered in the fourth scene at the house of Bartolo, the letter in hand; see *The Athenaeum* 25 (18 April 1828), 394c.

<sup>42</sup> *The Times* 13,901 (29 April 1829), 3b. For the bolero, see *The Harmonicon* 6 (1828), 171. Some bizarre interpolations could occur in this scene. Malibran playing her first Rosina in London in 1825, the disguised Count introduced one of his pupils, Velluti, to sing Rossini's 'Mille sospiri e lacrime' with her. (This was the Zenobia-Arsace's duet from the second act of *Aureliano in Palmira*.) The castrato, apparently, 'exceeded any thing which we had previously heard from him'; see *New Times* 8,400 (11 July 1825), 2c.

<sup>43</sup> Gossett has found that 'in some respects the Neapolitan "revision" reflects an earlier version than the Parisian "original" [for Giulia Grisi]: the cuts and recompositions made during the Parisian rehearsals

part of Fidalma in Cimarosa's Il matrimonio segreto, she arranged that the trio 'Faccio un'inchino' be sung 'a note lower than written'. This was a step too far for the Harmonicon, which printed that 'the system of transposing has been carried to a vicious excess in this opera than we ever before knew'.<sup>44</sup> Sontag's Cenerentola, one of her most accomplished roles, involved ratcheting it up from contralto, omitting 'one or two of her pieces' and interpolating heavily:

Sontag has taken great liberties with her part in this opera, and has made transpositions of keys, which are not always compatible with what is to follow. She is very fond of singing in G. This, indeed, appears to be the key in which she can mostly display the extent and power of her voice. One of her most successful transpositions is that in her cavatini [sic] in the finale, which, from E, she raises a tone and a half to G... [In this cavatina] she descends to G below the lines, sliding over, in the prettiest manner possible, a chromatic scale of great extent, with a grace and neatness that are absolutely irresistible.<sup>45</sup>

Semiramide's andante in G, 'Giorno d'orror!' – since it fell in Sontag's favourite key – could not have been better placed. Her voice was in its element, particularly as it neared the end of the movement. In the Sontag-Malibran version, the most commented-upon part of this cantabile, indeed of the whole duet-complex, was this double cadenza preparing for the tempo di mezzo, 'Madre, addio!' Of all the parts in these duets, both of which featured at Welsh's benefit of 15 June, the Courier singled out this section:

The beautiful duet Giorno d'Orrore [sic] seems now identified with the names of Sontag and Malibran; being concertante throughout, it is well chosen for the mutual display of their powers; neither can be said to play an inferior part, and in the contest, as it were, between them, they produce an effect of which no person who has not heard them can form an adequate conception. The delicious cadences of their own introduced at the end of the andante are executed as tastefully as they are written.<sup>46</sup>

Evidence suggests that Malibran composed the music for this in a sketchbook she used for preparing ornaments, variations, gestures, facial expressions, and other details of her parts. The Athenaeum hailed her work in June:

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happened after he had made the reformulations for Malibran'; see Vincenzo Bellini, I Puritani: Melodramma Serio in Three Acts, ed. Philip Gossett, 2 vols (New York, 1983), I, n.p.

<sup>44</sup> The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 205.

<sup>45</sup> The Athenaeum 22 (8 April 1829), 348a.

<sup>46</sup> The writer (probably Edward Taylor) continued: 'The duet Lasciami non t'ascolto [sic], which they also sang yesterday, is admirably suited for them, and may compete in every respect with the former'; see The Courier 11,724 (16 June 1829), 3c.

Double cadences, either by a voice or an instrument, or by two voices, are almost invariably the duller and worst arranged things possible; but, upon this occasion, the cadence of Sontag with Malibran was perhaps the most beautiful feature of the performance, not only as regarded the execution displayed, but the excellent arrangement of the passages, musically speaking; and especially let it be remembered, that it was the composition (for it deserves that denomination) of Malibran herself! The orchestral performers seemed to be inspired by the excellence of the singers, and the whole was exceedingly delightful, and highly superior to any previous performance of the same description.

Malibran's 'composition' reinforced the significance of the word 'pietà' and emphasised Semiramide's and Arsace's mutuality as mother and son. As for Moscheles' transcription, the *Athenaeum*, in a review of his *Gems*, confirmed that his reduction: 'skilfully imitates Malibran's double cadences in *Giorno d'orrore*'.<sup>47</sup> This being the case, Malibran authored this 'Cadenza a piacere':



Example 2: Double cadenza preparing for the tempo di mezzo in *Semiramide*'s 'Ebben a te: ferisci'; see Ignaz Moscheles, *Gems à la Malibran a dramatic fantasia for the piano forte II* 'with the admired embellishments & cadences, as sung by Mad. Malibran' (London: Mori & Lavenue, 1829). The blocked keyboard sections frame the cadenza.

Another classic Malibran trait was to insert pauses into the text at unconventional points. This was the case in the Sontag-Malibran version of *Tancredi*'s 'Lasciami, non t'ascolta'. In 1836, Castil-Blaze remembered that Malibran

<sup>47</sup> The critic wrote earlier: 'Malibran, who is highly-talented as a pianiste and writer, composes those she has sung with Sontag, &c. herself; and very clever, ingenious, and appropriate effusions they are'; see *The Athenaeum* 100 (23 September 1829), 601.

'would combine and note down points [of embellishment] in her duets'. 'We all recollect the pauses Mme. Malibran inserted in the three duets in Tancredi', he remembered in the Revue de Paris: 'She put in the best of them with Mlle. Sontag, and the tradition of them has remained'.<sup>48</sup> Registering these free insertions fully, the singers would follow Malibran's tendency by singing slowly and deliberately. 'Tancredi's 'Lascia mes' [sic: 'Lasciami'] had been sung more brilliantly than we ever remember to have heard it executed before;' the Athenaeum recorded in 1829, 'we were particularly struck with the effect it produced by the slowness with which they sang it, and exquisite taste in which all the introductions were made'.<sup>49</sup> The Victorian man of letters John Ruskin, who probably saw Malibran as a teenager in Paris in 1835, also recalled that she 'sang at least one-third slower than any modern [late nineteenth-century] cantatrice'.<sup>50</sup> The pace of this cadenza, in other words, would have added to the poignancy of the moment.

In the tempo d'attacco of 'Ebben, a te: ferisci', to return again to Semiramide, Moscheles' reduction suggests that Malibran marked out the word 'madre' (mother) by inserting an option (a pause for unmetered embellishment) above the word's first appearance as a melisma. Only fifteen bars into Arsace's second subject, this would both break Rossini's line and dramatize the dark connotations of that phrase 'mia madre ancor' ('still my mother').

<sup>48</sup> Cited in Pougin, Marie Malibran: the Story of a Great Singer, 282.

<sup>49</sup> The Athenaeum 82 (20 May 1829), 317.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Eric Bentley, ed., Shaw on Music (New York, 1983), 55.

The image displays a musical score for Example 3. It consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps), and common time. It contains the lyrics: "ma sei mia ma - dre, mia ma - dre an - cor sì, mia ma". The second staff is a keyboard accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs), starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third staff continues the vocal line with the lyrics "dre an - cor". The fourth staff continues the keyboard accompaniment, featuring a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 3: The keyboard part of Moscheles, *Gems à la Malibran*, 4-5 mapped against the vocal line of Gioacchino Rossini, *Semiramide: Melodramma tragico in Two Acts*. Libretto by Gaetano Rossi. A Facsimile Edition of Rossini's Original Manuscript, 2 vols (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978), II, 316r-v.

At this point, Moscheles' score bears imprints of each prima donna's vocal style. Sontag's gift for ascending and descending chromatic scales, for example, is borne out in the cabaletta. Her embellishments might, for example, rework both first- and second-time repeats in these terms:

The image displays a musical score for Example 4. It consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, key of D major (two sharps), and common time. It contains the lyrics: "Ah - non so - di qual - pe - ri - glio." The second staff is a keyboard accompaniment in grand staff, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a crescendo (*Cres*) marking. The third staff continues the vocal line with the lyrics "fier pre - sa - gio ag - ghiac - cia il cor". The fourth staff continues the keyboard accompaniment, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Example 4: Keyboard of Moscheles, *Gems à la Malibran*, 9, mapped against the vocal part found in Rossini, *Semiramide*. Facsimile, II, 329r-v.

In the 1820s, Rossini's *Otello* became an important vehicle for the display of Sontag's chromatic gifts, and an index of the prima donna's lawlessness in general. On 31 December 1827, the *Journal de Commerce* published a letter attributed to



Rossini announcing that Sontag had agreed (finally) to drop the Pasta-induced tradition of inserting what it called 'Oh quanto lagrime' into Otello. (This cavatina, of course, was the cabaletta in Malcolm's cavatina 'Elena! Oh tu che chiamo' from La donna del lago.) Since Rossini had not provided an entrance aria for Desdemona, this particular Otello substitution occurred more often than not by the late 1820s.<sup>51</sup> When Malibran débuted as Desdemona in London in her second role of the 1829 season, for example, she interpolated from Rossini's Torvaldo e Dorliska, 'Dove son? Chi m'alta?', at this point.<sup>52</sup> When Sontag sang Desdemona early in 1829, the Journal des débats found it necessary to comment on the brilliance of her volate. These words appeared (significantly) just a few hours before Sontag (as Amenaïde) and Malibran (as Tancredi) first crossed swords at the Théâtre Italien:

I'll never forget the sensation I felt during the victorious, rapidly rising chromatic scale written by Rossini that ends the second act of Otello. All the most famous Desdemonas had cheated there before, but Mademoiselle Sontag sang it with such force and freedom that I bounced on my bench. From that moment I have passed my complete Otello. Go ahead, criticize this singer on the rest of the role, say that she is inferior to her estimable challengers, fine. It doesn't matter. I have my chromatic scale.<sup>53</sup>

Such a physical response to music relates to what I call an 'erotics of listening' which was emerging vigorously in this age of 'Sontagmanie'. 'When Mademoiselle Sontag runs up or down a chromatic scale', the Times confirmed in September, 'the metallic vibration of her voice, the perfect clearness of her articulation and of the sound she utters, satisfy every ear'.<sup>54</sup> Chopin too wrote that

<sup>51</sup> See The Harmonicon 6 (1828), 79. On 7 September 1824, Pasta realised that, because she had recently inserted 'Elena! Oh tu che chiamo' into a production of Otello at the Théâtre Italien, she would struggle to perform it in its original context when La donna del lago appeared soon after. She therefore interpolated 'Ah! quel giorno ognor rammento' from Semiramide in its place; see Gioachino Rossini, Edizione critica delle opere de Gioachino Rossini. Sezione 1, Opere teatrali. Vol. 29, La donna del lago: melo-dramma in due atti di Andrea Leone Tottola, ed. H. Colin Slim, 3 vols, (Pesaro, 1990), I, xxxix. When Sontag and Pisoni came together in 1828 at the Théâtre Italien for La donna del lago, the most popular part of the opera was a duet from Bianca e Falliero which was introduced; see The Harmonicon 6 (1828), 73. This Parisian tradition dated back to 1824 when Bianca e Falliero's scena 'Divisi noi!' and duet 'Sappi che un rio dovere' first appeared at the beginning of the second act of La donna del lago under Rossini's auspices. The opera's quartet 'Cielo! Il mio labbro ispira' had been similarly introduced in this production, the music of these operas apparently amalgamating into each other; see *Ibid.*, I, xxviii.

<sup>52</sup> The Times (27 April 1829), 2f. See also the original libretto (in the Cambridge University Library): Gioachino Rossini, Torvaldo e Dorliska, dramma semiserio di C. Sterbini (Roma, 1816), 8.

<sup>53</sup> Le Journal des débats (15 February 1829), also quoted in Johnson, Listening in Paris: A Cultural History, 225.

<sup>54</sup> See The Times (14 September 1829), 6f. By mid-1829, Ayrton had finally had enough of 'her eternal descending run of semitones'. Reviewing a performance of Mozart's Le nozze di Figaro, he was

'her diminuendi are non plus ultra, her portamenti wonderful and her scales, particularly ascending chromatic, excellent'.<sup>55</sup> The physical effect of her sliding scales, in other words, titillated every ear.

Not so much revered for her chromatic technique, Malibran was unassailable in her ability to leap between tessiture. Her skill in this regard suggests itself forcefully in Moscheles' reduction. Probably best described in modern terms as a mezzo, her voice featured an extraordinary upper extension – a third octave. Her range and power was shown off to its fullest extent when it alternated suddenly between dramatic melodie lunghe and agile flourishes. In this, her voice prefigured the ideal vocal line of the 1830s. Allied to this was her idiosyncratic tendency to throw accents into her voice – 'small, piqued notes which are thrown out from time to time like a ball in flight' (see for example the first two bars of Example 3).<sup>56</sup> The Times, continuing its critique of 'impulses of a wild and disorderly nature', wrote that 'Malibran displays a certain energy; she likewise shows occasional sparks of fire ... which her admirers call inspirations heureuses, [but which] are little better than fits and starts; they break upon the audience like sudden claps of thunder, through a quiet and unruffled atmosphere'.<sup>57</sup>

Such small assertions of the power of the diva were minor compared to the large-scale alterations effected during production. Arie de baule or pezzi di baule [literally 'baggage' arias] could alter the whole landscape of operas.<sup>58</sup> The period of the late 1820s and early 1830s saw extreme activities in this regard. Malibran, for one, famously substituted the whole of Bellini's final tomb scene in I Capuleti with Vaccai's scena ed aria 'Ah! Se tu dormi' from Giulietta e Romeo (1825) – although this was said to be on Rossini's recommendation. Equally drastic was the well-

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appalled by her 'Porgi, amor': '[It] almost makes one wish that her pretty mouth were closed by the padlock fastened upon Papageno's for a much more pardonable offence'; see The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 178.

<sup>55</sup> See Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger, Chopin: Pianist and Teacher, ed. Roy Howat, trans. Krycia Osostowicz, Roy Howat and Naomi Shohet (Cambridge, 1986), 114.

<sup>56</sup> Le Globe 6/92 (6 September 1828), 682. The writer, reporting on Malibran's début in Paris, attacked her for 'la lenteur dans tous les mouvements [including strettos], le manque de contraste, le défaut de progression dans la vivacité de la mesure, ou, en d'autres termes, le défaut d'entraînement, voilà ce qui rend si souvent l'exécution de notre pauvre Théâtre-Italien si pale, si glaciale, si décolorée... [The reviewer would prefer her to sacrifice] ces petites notes piques qu'elle lance de temps en temps comme une balle à la volée. Cette espèce d'agréments métalliques'. Elsewhere, the Times criticised her Rosina in similar terms: '[Malibran] never sympathizes with the audience, and the accent of true nature must of necessity be frequently lost amongst these convulsive shrieks and this display of violent gesticulation'; see The Times (14 September 1829), 6c.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 6f.

<sup>58</sup> For more on interpolation, see Hilary Poriss, 'Making their Way through the World: Italian One-Hit Wonders', in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music 24/3 (2001), 197–224.

known 'Malibran version' of Otello, where the contralto sings the Moor an octave up – a tradition originally instituted by Pasta. When Ayrton saw Pasta render this 'absolutely disgusting' spectacle in 1828, he protested at being confronted with 'the noble Otello twist his hand in the tresses of the woman he still loved ... with the ferocity of a savage attacking his deadly enemy'.<sup>59</sup> The Times of the 2 June 1829 reported that a performance of Semiramide had to be temporarily abandoned in 1829 after the audience objected to an attempt by Benedetta Pisaroni (as Arsace) and Carlo Zucchelli (Assur) to omit their confrontation duet, 'Bella imago degli Dei', in the first act. Malibran played the title role on this occasion, the newspaper commenting that her 'Ebben, a te: ferisci' with Pisaroni involved 'music of a highly dramatic and striking character':

Much discontent was manifested by the audience in the early part of the performance in consequence of an attempt to omit the whole of the 7<sup>th</sup> [sic] scene in which Madame Pisaroni and Zucchelli had two or three of the best duets in the opera to sing. The clamour rose to such a pitch as to suspend for a while the performance; but the malcontents were finally appeased by the appearance of Arsaces [sic] and Assur who gave the scene as usual. The plea of omission was an accidental lameness which had occurred to Signor Zucchelli.<sup>60</sup>

A better example relating to Tancredi involved Malibran's interpolation of Pacini's 'Dopo tante e tante pene' to make up for what she felt was Rossini's vocally unflattering rondò-finale. In this, she once again followed the model of Pasta, who when faced with the same Tancredi conundrum in 1826 had the gall to ask Rossini to compose a new set of variations on Nicolini's 'Or che son vicino a te' from Il conte di Lenosse (1801) to substitute for the now outdated original. Whilst recomposing these changes, Rossini consented to a modified 'Lasciami, non t'ascolta'. Even today, most

<sup>59</sup> The Harmonicon was quick to pounce on this Moorish travesty: 'We considered the character [Otello] already an exaggeration, as ten times more unnatural when personated by a female, whose undisguisable form and voice are anything but masculine? – that a delirium of passion, not very pleasing in the ruder sex, is absolutely disgusting when portrayed by one of that sex which can only excite our sympathy in scenes of tenderness or distress?... The composer's intentions must be thwarted, his harmonies reversed, and his general design subverted, by throwing the whole of the principal part an octave higher than he intended ... we may see Madame Pasta restored to Nature and to Desdemona, and again enjoy that unalloyed pleasure which we have always experienced in witnessing her representation of a character so exactly suited to her in every way'; see The Harmonicon 6 (1828), 172.

<sup>60</sup> The writer continued: '[Malibran sang Semiramide] with great accuracy and effect.... [She] gave much dramatic force to the address in the 12th scene, wherein the nation is invoked to swear obedience to the new King about to be proclaimed; but it wanted the majestic dignity and the graceful deportment which made it so impressive and interesting a scene in the hands of Pasta'; see The Times 13,930 (2 June 1829), 3e.

contralti leave off Pasta's triplet figurations at the end of this introduction. Bear in mind that her ornamentations were tame by Malibran's standards.<sup>61</sup>

*Allegro giusto*

Cadenze per Giuditta Pasta (1820s)

La - sciami: non t'a - scolto

Adelaide Malanotte's original (1813)

...t'a - scolto

3

non t'a - scol-to: [se-] dur - mi in - van, in - van tu - spe - ri:

...t'a - ...se - dur - mi in - van - tu -

8

quei sguardi lu-sin - ghie - ri ser - ba, ser - ba al no - vel lo a

15

mor, se - dur - mi in - van tu spe ri: quei

...se - dur -

18

sguar - di lu - sin - ghie ri ser - ba al novel - lo a mor quei

...lu - sin - ...lo a - mor

22

sguar - di lu - sin - ghie ri

...lu - sin - ghie ri

23

ser - ba al no - vel lo a - mor.

*a piacere*

ser - ba al - no - vel lo a -

Example 5. Malanotte and Pasta compared in 'Lasciami, non t'ascolto'; see Gioachino Rossini, *Edizione critica: Tancredi*, ed. Philip Gossett (Fondazioni Rossini Pesaro, 1984), 320 and 607.

<sup>61</sup> Gioachino Rossini, *Edizione critica delle opere di Gioachino Rossini. Sezione 1, Opere teatrali. Vol. 10, Tancredi: melodramma eroico in due atti di Gaetano Rossi*, ed. Philip Gossett (Pesaro, 1984), xxxv.

Around 1829, to sum up, the diva won supremacy using a four-way tactic of transposition, ornamentation, interpolation and substitution. Listeners experienced exhilaration when she broke into these moments a piacere. To return to the 'erotics of listening': the effect achieved was not only a by-product of vocal doubling. Ten years earlier Stendhal had remembered a duet in Rossini's Armida, 'Amor! (possente nome!)' (admittedly this was for tenor and soprano), which gave him 'a ten-day erection'. 'If your bladder can stand it, go listen to it', he recommended to a friend.<sup>62</sup> Here, as in Tancredi and Semiramide, the singer's freedom was also expressed in ornament and elaboration. The female singer took on a heightened sense of seduction and power both as she doubled with a 'twin' and as she deviated from the score.

An extraordinary passage occurring once more in the Athenaeum describes Sontag and Malibran in the andantino, 'Ah! come mai quell'anima', from Tancredi's 'Lasciami, non t'ascolta'. It registers a moment of female creation – recreation; not merely an act of making, but of remaking, of 'making over' from a base, pre-existing materiality. What becomes striking here for audiences – as they take in these 'variations', 'cadences' and 'interpolations' – is a 'biology of the voice'. The sexual charge of the singer, in other words, is seen to interfere in moments of digression and free play. As Sontag and Malibran fold into each other, the listener is witness to something primordial or procreative. A replication of bodies takes place which is explicit, animal and immediate:

Nothing can exceed the sweetness of the union of these two voices. No instruments, prepared by the first art, ever attained a more perfect and reciprocal nicety of tone. No birds 'sitting upon the forest's midmost tree' poured forth notes more silvery and flowing. And, to carry to the highest possible degree of beauty this common and equal charm, art and industry have been diligently employed to adapt themselves each to the other; so that their ornaments and variations are like the flights of mated birds; their wings are spread together and twinkle in the air – they rise or sink, and float here and there, in circles or angles, or straight onwards; but still inseparable as at first, their pinions keeping the same aerial track, their bodies almost commingled. Their duets are like a succession of the sweetest of earthly sounds heard simultaneously with their echoes, and, in the

<sup>62</sup> In a 15 April 1819 letter to Adolphe de Marest. For more on 'the erotics of music', see Stephen Downes, 'Musical Pleasures and Amorous Passions: Stendhal, the Crystallization Process, and Listening to Rossini and Beethoven', 19th-Century Music 36/3 (2003), 235–51, 238.



minute cadences and florid interpolations, the effect of these quick reverberations is almost miraculous.<sup>63</sup>

The Athenaeum's free association on 'commingled bodies' in 1829 carries with it metaphors that recur time and again in critical writing of the time. Images of flight, processes of revealing, women showing themselves and talk of a 'naked roulade' repeat in many contexts. In Massimilla Doni (1839), Balzac has a character revel in the promiscuous flow of such 'sheer music'. A kind of spontaneous ovulation occurs, only a few years after Karl Ernst von Bauer 'discovered' this in women in 1827:

The roulade is the highest expression of art: it is the arabesque adorning the most beautiful room in the house: a little less and it is nothing; a little more and everything is confusion. Performing its task of reawakening in your soul a thousand ideas that lay dormant, it takes wing, it flies through space, sowing in the air seeds which are gathered by the ear and blossom within the heart.... It is deplorable that the masses have forced musicians to make their expression depend on words, on factitious elements – admittedly they would not be understood by the masses. The roulade is therefore the only point left to the friends of pure music, those who love the art in all its nakedness.<sup>64</sup>

Such an unadulterated defence of vocal virtuosity may seem peculiar for modern tastes. Yet Balzac's spirited vindication of the roulade de bravoure is more than merely playful. His words represent a widespread critical fascination for ornament in the culture of display and sensibility of the 1820s. For Balzac, the roulade sows seeds, but they are sown in air – vacuously. If the singer (re)creates, she does so unconsciously, automatically, in spite of herself.

### 'She just sings'

Women don't know what they are saying, that's the whole difference between them and me.

Jacques Lacan<sup>65</sup>

The Argyll Rooms saw spectacular scenes of feminine display and authorship in 1829: Malibran's a piacere additions doubled in the mouths of two cantatrices, lavishly-dressed women seated amongst the orchestra, flowers and embroidery thronged a strange parallelogram-shaped room. Mendelssohn recalled (at the 30 May

<sup>63</sup> The writer, reviewing the 20 June performance of Tancredi at the King's Theatre, had just written of 'the hazy lustre in which [Malibran's Tancredi] moves'; see The Athenaeum 87 (24 June 1829), 395.

<sup>64</sup> Translated in Celletti, A History of Bel Canto, 141.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One (1977), trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, 1985), 86.

concert) being 'highly amused to see bonnets agitated at every little cadenza, which to me and many critics brought to mind the simile of the wind and the tulip-bed'.<sup>66</sup> The florid female picture, aurally enhanced with roulades, arpeggios and trills painted a dynamic, protean picture. All in all, these were powerful scenes – exhibitions in every sense of Her intoxicating vitality.

The fusing of two into one involved a double process of combination and dispersal. An authorial female voice emerges in an historical and cultural sense around 1829, at the time of these flower-laden concerts. Via her public representatives, Sontag and Malibran, we have seen her breaking into the masculine code; she emerges strongly into the operatic-symbolic order. But there are provisos. Woman enters 'Romantic Opera' (and I use this phrase advisedly) as a way of diffusing its meaning. Although she is larger than life – although she is Diva twice over – her subjectivity is dispersed. At the very moment cultural narratives begin to orbit around her, her voice scatters, the sonorous fabric splits in two. The ideal operatic object – the singing voice – undergoes a loosening of origin. Not only is she expressed as an impossible, quasi-metaphysical double-sign; as the remainder of this chapter will show, each of her vocal lines – her individualities – seem to be divided/diffuse too.

Four factors undo her. First: her voice is split; it has been transferred outside of itself into the mouth of another of the same. Second: as Diderot theorised, she is predisposed to masking herself and play-acting. 'Nature is like a woman who enjoys disguising herself', the encyclopaedist hypothesized, 'and whose different disguises, revealing now one part of her and now another, permit those who study her assiduously to hope that one day they may know the whole of her person'.<sup>67</sup> For Diderot, the female tendency to impersonate rather than be herself betrayed a fundamental poverty of character. Unfathomable as a singularity, she appeared only by displacing her person elsewhere. To know her was to study her vicissitudes. She will only reveal herself vicariously via impersonation and pretence. Third: she can speak only by singing – in a warm motherese. Lastly: there is a radical automization of her voice as her technique is tested in every register.

Malibran and Sontag are given no life outside music. These delicate creatures live their parts; their biographies infuse into operatic worlds. Not knowable in

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<sup>66</sup> In a letter of 5 June 1829; see Jourdan, 'Mendelssohn in England', 100.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement* (Oxford, 1994), 18.

themselves, they must be known in parts: Cenerentola, Rosina, Euryanthe, Elena, Donna Anna, Zerlina, Cendrillon, Ninetta, Clari, Norma, Fidalma, Amina, Semiramide, Desdemona, Amenaïde, Palmide, Felicia, Giulietta. After meeting Malibran in the summer of 1833, Bellini wrote: 'throwing her arms around my neck, she said to me in the most exalted transport of joy, with those four notes of mine: 'Ah! m'abbraccia!' [from the final scene of *La Sonnambula*] and said nothing more'.<sup>68</sup>

With nothing to say, she could not get outside her Amina personality. Reality and illusion were confused for her. Bellini kept an oval miniature of the singer, her right hand raised to her hair, which he wore at the knot of his cravat.<sup>69</sup> The maestro referred to her as 'that diavoletta of a Malibran, who between evening and morning can learn a whole opera for you'. Such was their affinity and her identification with the characters she played.<sup>70</sup>

Malibran's only apposite sphere of utterance was song. Lawrence Kramer has set out the implications of this better than I can: 'Song is a partial dissociation of speech: a loosening of phonetic and syntactic articulation and a dissolving of language into its physical origin, vocalization'.<sup>71</sup> At her emergence into language, Kramer infers, the prima donna enters a field of expression that is primary, modern and pre-symbolic. Verbalising in loose-talk – in a vernacular of scattered vocalise – she can only express herself operatically. Alphonse Lamartine marked out this sphere of operation when he wrote that 'she was music, or even better, poetry in the form of a woman'.<sup>72</sup> Having seen Malibran's *Norma* in Bologna, the American author Nathaniel Willis remarked how the 'Siren of Europe' seemed possessed by her vocal line: 'The incomparable creature sang with a fullness, an abandonment, a passionate energy and sweetness that seemed to come from a soul rapt and possessed beyond control with the melody it had undertaken'.<sup>73</sup> In *Musurgia Vocalis*, Isaac Nathan, a composer and friend of Byron, spoke of her as 'this fable of music', 'this tenth Muse', in terms of the eighteenth-century poet Thomas Gray's encomium: 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn'. He imagined that she was 'a transfusion of nature in

<sup>68</sup> See Herbert Weinstock, *Vincenzo Bellini: His Life and Operas* (London, 1972), 145.

<sup>69</sup> Florimo probably 'edited' the letters that Bellini wrote to him before having them published. Inventions and lies are in any case often more interesting than truth; see *Ibid.*, 144–6.

<sup>70</sup> According to a letter to Florimo of 5 January 1835, the authenticity of which is in dispute; see *Ibid.*, 144–6. See also the facsimile of the autograph in Bellini, *I Puritani: Melodramma Serio in Three Acts*, n.p.

<sup>71</sup> Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley, 1984), 130.

<sup>72</sup> In his *Portraits et Salons*; see Bushnell, *Maria Malibran: A Biography of a Singer*, 230.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in William Henry Husk, ed., *Templeton and Malibran*. (London, 1880), 34.

all her varieties into the delicious sounds: – for she feels what she sings, and she sings, what she feels'.<sup>74</sup> She was like an embodiment of Music Itself; her electric body sung even when her lips were closed. A German writer who saw Malibran in the winter of 1831 in Paris explained:

She did not only sing with her mouth. Every limb of her body sang. The sounds shot out in sparks from her eyes, from her fingers: they streamed from her hair. She was singing even when mute.<sup>75</sup>

She oozed singing: her hair, eyes and fingers. She seemed – like an object – to be woven together acoustically. Gautier summarised her when he wrote simply that: 'she was music'.<sup>76</sup>

With Sontag, a similar reduction could be made. Gautier described Malibran's rival thus:

Sontag!... when we were young ... the beauty of Mademoiselle Henriette Sontag was something so spirituelle, seemingly, to us, so far elevated above common mortality, that reason was the slave of sensation – a double entrancement of the eye and ear.... To describe her powers minutely would occupy too much space, but they are all summed up in one short sentence. Sontag sings!<sup>77</sup>

Berlioz experienced this same creature. It was useless trying to make a summary of her. She just sung – effortlessly like an automaton:

On she carols, higher and higher, like a lark at 'heaven's gate', so soft, so clear, so wonderfully distinct that, like the silver bell from the altar, it is heard through the pealing organ. But her principal merit, in our eyes, is the absence of 'rant' – the substitute of genius – in any shape whatever. She always SINGS, and does not depend on mere strength of lungs – erroneously called 'power'. She never strains her delicate organ – that sweet instrument so susceptible of every shade of expression.<sup>78</sup>

This 'incarnation of song', as the Harmonicon called her, never forced or made faces. She was just so. Her voice made sense of her.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Isaac Nathan, Musurgia Vocalis; an Essay on the History and Theory of Music, and on the Qualities, Capabilities, and Management of the Human Voice, 2nd edn. (London, 1836), 267–8.

<sup>75</sup> Louis Borne wrote this in 1830–1 in his Briefe aus Paris; cited in Pougin, Marie Malibran: the Story of a Great Singer, 116.

<sup>76</sup> See April Fitzlyon, Maria Malibran, Diva of the Romantic Age (London, 1987), 79.

<sup>77</sup> Théophile Gautier, 'Past and Present', Life of Henriette Sontag, Countess de Rossi with Interesting Sketches (New York, 1852), 51–2, 52.

<sup>78</sup> Hector Berlioz, 'How Sontag Sings', 53.

<sup>79</sup> The Harmonicon 6 (1828), 120.

Allied to the resonance of Sontag's body was the sense of her instrumentalization. Her sound had the opacity of a 'voice-object', a term readily applied to Sontag in her heyday. Although often worshipped for the motorized quality of her singing, this 'idol' was frequently criticised for it – particularly as it impinged on her style of ornamentation. Her Rosina, for some critics, suffered from such exacting displays of the 'flexibility of her organs'.

It is true, she imitated also the defects of these [musical] instruments [in 'Una voce poco fa'], namely, that of repetition, as, on four different pauses, she used precisely the same cadence. This she seems to have learnt from instrumental performers.<sup>80</sup>

Her throat appeared to disconnect from her body. She sang, as the Athenaeum explained, 'with a precision, rapidity and delicacy of execution that has caused her, not inaptly, to be compared to a living musical snuff-box'.<sup>81</sup> Her hypostatisation was not so much the result of her voice being restrained, as the result of it being set free (as it had been made to turn back and repeat itself). Magazines marvelled at this level of automization. All signs of physical exertion had been pressed beneath her perfect skin. 'Her evolutions through the mazes of sound', one writer noted, were at once spontaneous and preconceived. It was as though she were being played on by some external force. If you watched her chest – many were prone to – you would not catch her breathing:

Not only were all passages alike to her, but she appropriated some that were hitherto to belong to instruments – to the pianoforte and the violin for instance. Arpeggios and chromatic scales, passages ascending and descending.... There is a firmness and neatness that appertain to the piano forte, while she will go through a scale, staccato, with the precision of a bow.... The ear is never disturbed by a harsh sound – the notes trickle and sparkle like the diamond drops of the brightest fountain. Every thing is rendered clear and liquid by solution.... She appeared to sing like a bird, from impulse, and to feel

<sup>80</sup> The Athenaeum 25 (18 April 1828), 395. A reviewer attending a musical soirée under the auspices of Bohrer and Pixis in Paris found Sontag's charms overrated: 'Never was a singer gifted with a voice more pure, equal, and flexible, than this young lady, and never were qualities, so rarely found in unison, so lamentable abused. The air of Mercadante, composed expressly for her, and which is nothing but a tissue of passages fitted to display the flexibility of her organs, and the variations to a Swiss air, which terminated the concert, contain such a profusion of notes devoid of all meaning, of every moral intention, that in spite of the perfection and precision displayed in executing them, it was impossible to resist the ennui they occasioned'; see The Harmonicon 6 (1828), 119.

<sup>81</sup> See The Athenaeum 41 (6 August 1828), 653.



whilst she inspired delight. There was no distortion, not even the heaving of her bosom was visible.<sup>82</sup>

She seemed both doll-like – hard and shiny – and a natural being – liquid and seductive. (Like Homer's siren, she was half-bird, half-woman.) A form without substance, her soprano set her out as an icon of the 1820s. One of the era's many temptations, charms and luxuries, her person – though soft and supple – shimmered with the lustre of a commodity. That 'heaving' sexuality covered over, her sleekness presented a screen on which desire could be projected. Figured into a paradise of capital exchange, she intoxicated in ways that exalted the emerging economy of commerce and transaction. Scudo, the conservative Italo-French music critic, described her singing as though he were at a jewellery shop:

In the magnificent casket of vocal gems which Sontag displayed every night before her admirers, we especially remarked upon the brilliancy of her trills, which sparkled like rubies on a velvet ground. Each note of those long-descending spirals stood out as if it had been struck isolatedly, and attached to the following note by an imperceptible and delicate solder, and all these marvels were accomplished with a perfect grace, never disfiguring her countenance by the slightest sign of effort. Her charming figure, her fine limpid and soft eyes, her elegant form and her stature, springing and supple as a stem of a young poplar, finished the picture and completed the enchantment.<sup>83</sup>

Supple as a poplar, she bent to the whims of her times. The 1820s saw the first female shop assistants, the arcade, the panorama and the mobile gaze of the flâneur and flâneuse. Idle fashions were cultivated for chaotic interieures: Indian shawls, Egyptian cashmere, hashish, handkerchiefs, perfumes, oysters, cafés and Satanism. This was the era of the open display of goods, fixed pricing, the seductive show of merchandise, department stores, ready-made clothing, the ideology of free markets, a rage for graffiti, aphrodisiacs and bad taste. There was nothing true, nothing real in the play of surfaces passing before you. Sontag cultivated this lustre of distraction. As the physician Augustus Granville argued, she was only du moment:

Her beauty dazzled me – her singing pleased and disappointed me.–  
She is slender, rather petite and mignonne. Her countenance, like that of Canova's nymph, is full of sweetness and heavenly radiancy, which belongs more to the beau ideal than to mortal reality.... She is,

<sup>82</sup> The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 9 (1827), 482. These words are paraphrased in Cox, Musical Recollections of the Last Half-Century, 163.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in X, 'From my Study', in The Musical Times (1 May 1894), 299–304, 303–4.

in fact, a pretty thing – a pretty singer, a pretty bijoux, and nothing more.<sup>84</sup>

At issue here was not so much the automization of Sontag's voice as its examination under a fine gaze. Was this not why the turning or spinning of her voice seemed so alluring? In the 1820s, how else was value to be ascertained? How else would her voice be shown from all sides? How else was a price to be put on such vocal brilliance?

Pursued by fantasies of possession, Sontag was available everywhere. In Vienna, one of her satin slippers had been stolen by youths and used to drink champagne. In Frankfurt, men had untied the horses from her carriage in order to pull it themselves.<sup>85</sup> In Berlin, army officers had fought duels over tickets to see her at the opera-house. In Spandau, Ludwig Rellstab, the eminent music critic, spent three months of 1827 in prison after satirizing Sontag's relationship with a diplomat.<sup>86</sup> She was both visible and desirable; it was important that she tantalized – availability is key here – that she tempted and evaded acquisition at the same time.

As if to confirm her commodification, the cantatrice captured the attention of a new lithographic market. Dealers such as J. Bocker or Albert Hoffay ran a roaring trade in the reproduction of her image. Inventing new and novel ways to show her off, they copied and recopied her in every conceivable pose.<sup>87</sup> As the Athenaeum mused in 1828:

Her face has ever been truly German, but of that fair and pleasing order so frequently met among the Bourgeoisie, near Frankfort. Waiving our critical functions for a while, we often regret, notwithstanding her beautiful teeth, the professional necessity for opening her lips at all: it puts to flight a delicious and sweet-tempered expression, which the finest tones of her voice can never banish from our remembrance.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>84</sup> The Athenaeum 22 (8 April 1828), 347. This was an extracted preview from Augustus Bozzi Granville, St Petersburg. A Journal of Travels to and from that Capital, 2nd edn., 2 vols (London, 1829), 1, 276.

<sup>85</sup> See Louis Borne, 'Henriette Sontag in Frankfurt', Life of Henriette Sontag, Countess de Rossi with Interesting Sketches (New York, 1852), 46–51, 49. These stories had several variations. One journal wrote: 'Passing through Göttingen, several of the students, envious of the happiness enjoyed by the horses in dragging the lovely form of Madlle Sontag, took out the unremonstrating animals from the carriage, and hauled it in'; see The Atlas V/191 (10 January 1830), 28c.

<sup>86</sup> See Alan Walker, Franz Liszt I: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847, 3 vols (London, 1983), I, 184.

<sup>87</sup> See the advertisements for engravings of Sontag by Albert Hoffay (London: B. J. M. McClary, 1828) or J. Bocker (London: Ackermann, 1828) in The Athenaeum 28 (7 May 1828), 442, or The Athenaeum 25 (18 April 1828), 394.

<sup>88</sup> The Athenaeum 28 (7 May 1828), 440.

Though one would like to hear her sing, to see her vocal chords, one might also want to see her objectified – silent. And if Sontag's ubiquity in the world of 1820s pornography is anything to go by, the Athenaeum critic was not alone in this desire. Risqué mezzotints, lithographs, etchings, aquatints and linocuts were essential to the perpetuation of her popularity. Pisanus Fraxi's Bibliography of Prohibited Books indexes several appearances of her, The Virgin's Oath; or, the Fate of Sontag printed for G. Cannon around 1828–30 being particularly notable. Explicit scenes characterised this imprint, billed as a 'picture of unbridled lust and licentiousness, unparalleled in history'. It told the story of Sontag's secret betrothal to Prince Hardenberg, the Prussian ambassador in London and stand-in for the real-life Count Rossi.<sup>89</sup> The songstress having arrived in London, the true-life figure of Prince Leopold (uncle of Princess Victoria and future King of Belgium) bribes one of her attendants to drug her. At the opportune moment (she is unconscious), the Prince enters her boudoir, cuts her dress from her with a pair of scissors, and has his evil way. Not satisfied with his first ravishing, he repeats the outrage as she is regaining herself. To his delight, he finds that her wakening body is acquiescent and surrendering.<sup>90</sup>

This material, though it never made it to the shelves, perpetuated the fantasy of Sontag's passivity. Her docile limbs had grown used to numbing themselves to the manipulations of external desire. There was a readiness to service any operatic fantasy, a willingness to give pleasure. Mimesis being proper to her, she could shift shape at the drop of a hat, displaying a pliancy that was based not so much in naïveté as in a basic promiscuity of character; suppleness was her trademark. Her expertise did not involve so much a knowledge of the character of the male sex, as of every nuance of her own. She was equally at home as any of the girl-types identified in those catalogue manuals of the 1820s, such as Piers Shafton's Female Character Illustrated of 1829.<sup>91</sup> Taxonomies of this sort were indispensable if the fairer sex were to be known in all its guises. All stereotypes were natural to her: the grisette (young working-class seamstress), lionne (courtesan), lorette, rat (young danseuse),

<sup>89</sup> See The Times (14 June 1827), 3a.

<sup>90</sup> See Pisanus Fraxi, Bibliography of Prohibited Books, 3 vols (London, 1962), III, 316–7. Rumours also circulated at this time that Sontag had been the mistress of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gouldburn; see 'Leo Sacks – one of the Charity Crabs', in Mary D. George, ed., Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires, XI, 163.

<sup>91</sup> The existence of this popular publication had only been ascertained from its many periodical reviews in 1829, but it was typical of its type.

laundress, flower seller, modiste, mignone, grande horizontale. Shown from every angle, she invited opera-goers everywhere to 'see her parts'. Her vocal facility, in other words, freed her to be anything you wanted her to be.

Encircled by her cascading voice, Sontag's body threatened to dissociate in sympathy. As every vocal strand divided within itself, so her physical frame turned inwards and seemed to wrench apart. In Louis Borne's case, for example, listening to her was impossible without dismembering her mentally: 'I could not see and hear her at the same time', he explained, 'and I had to think of her points of excellence one by one, together, in order to arrive at the sum of her worth'.<sup>92</sup> Since her audio-visuality was overwhelming, breaking her down in an imagined act of violence was the only option available. How else was Sontag's multiplicity to be explained? Borne was not alone in craving her dissection. Reviewers across Europe felt a compulsive need to make shopping lists – teeth, foot, mouth, jaw, eyes, nose, hair, arms, carriage, ankles, neck – so as to arrive at the sum of her. Her foot, for instance, was famously picked out by Granville. 'I would say that her foot is the prettiest thing imaginable, if her hands were not prettier still', the doctor began. 'She is faultless as to teeth, which the sweetest smile imaginable, for ever hovering round her mouth, sets off at every warble in all their glory'. If any part made sense of her voice, it was her hair: 'Her chevalure, between auburn and blonde, is magnificent'.<sup>93</sup> Hack writers cultivated an infatuation with her body parts as if they bore no relation to her living person. Four such indices, one appearing in the Harmonicon, another in the writings of George Hogarth, another in Julie de Margueritte's Souvenirs of the Opera in Europe, and the last in the Athenaeum, followed the example of Granville and the booklet that had had Rellstab jailed. His Henriette, die schöne Sängerin described 'the charms of bright and playful eyes, of lips that rival the rose-bud, an angel's countenance, and a figure modelled after the Graces':<sup>94</sup>

Mademoiselle Sontag is stated to be nineteen years of age; she cannot exceed one or two-and-twenty. She is of a middling stature and inclining to embonpoint. Her hair and complexion are fair, her eyes blue, with that kind of Roxaline nose – the nez retroussé, which often gives the appearance of great vivacity ... Her mouth is well made ... and it is lined by a set of teeth, the beauty of which she does not conceal. Her countenance indicates good temper, and is extremely

<sup>92</sup> Borne, 'Henriette Sontag in Frankfurt', 48.

<sup>93</sup> The Athenaeum 22 (8 April 1828), 347. This passage was extracted from Granville, St Petersburg. A Journal of Travels to and from that Capital, 276.

<sup>94</sup> Extracted in The Athenaeum 24 (15 April 1828), 375.

pleasing.... Her hand and arm are beautiful, and her foot is not unworthy of the encomiums lavished on it. Her carriage is not objectionable.<sup>95</sup>

She was about one-and-twenty; of the middle status, and round and plump in the figure, with beautiful hands and arms, and a foot not unworthy of the admiration it had met with. She had light hair, a fair complexion, and blue eyes, which made her altogether very English-looking. She had a pretty mouth, embellished with a fine set of teeth, and a sweet and good-humoured countenance.<sup>96</sup>

She is exactly the height of the Medicean Venus, what the moderns call the middle height: her figure, though slight, has the full proportions of womanhood: her skin glows with the soft tint of the China rose; her arms and hands are faultless; her ankle, revealed by the short petticoat that of the 'Danzatrice'; the foot, one for which the glass slipper would be too large. Who can describe her face? The soft, pouting lips of infancy, the delicate features, the large, melting blue eye, the finely turned oval face, enshrined in a cloud of golden curls.<sup>97</sup>

No one can deny, however, that Mademoiselle Sontag has a figure of great symmetry, – a fine open countenance, expressive blue eyes, perfectly regular teeth, a beautiful hand, and a smile of the greatest imaginable cheerfulness and good-nature; and yet, notwithstanding all these, the union produces only a pleasing and pretty woman.<sup>98</sup>

Sorted into 'a pleasing and pretty woman', Sontag accumulated – in the end – into an index of disparate and unreal fragments. She amounted to very little of substance. Her 'je ne sais quoi vaporeux, ce gazouillement indéterminé', Le Globe commented, 'est quelque chose de délicieux'.<sup>99</sup> Lack of force, to put it another way, was precisely what gave her meaning and strength. Her inability to make up her mind, and a general tonelessness, made her a 'fluttering, unstable, whimsical little creature', as Edward Holmes put in 1828:

Mademoiselle Sontag has a pleasant quality of voice, with a small quantity of tone in it, but with plenty of flexibility; an endowment which she displays so frequently that, if one could but check the

<sup>95</sup> The Harmonicon 6 (1828), 120. This passage was paraphrased in Cox, Musical Recollections of the Last Half-Century, 160. Sontag is generally accepted to have been born in 1806, which would have made her twenty-one at the time of her marriage. It seems likely this date was fabricated in later life to clean up a somewhat sordid past in the family of entertainers. Her mother had twelve children, only three husbanded by Sontag's father.

<sup>96</sup> George Hogarth, Memoirs of the Musical Drama, 2 vols (London, 1838), II, 406.

<sup>97</sup> Margueritte, 'Souvenirs of the Opera in Europe', 59.

<sup>98</sup> The Athenaeum 25 (18 April 1828), 394.

<sup>99</sup> Le Globe 6/89 (1828), 658.



fluttering, unstable, whimsical little creature, a long breathing clear  
would not be invaluable.<sup>100</sup>

Wordsworth wrote famously of 'the spotless ether of a maiden life', a category Sontag exemplified. From her beginnings, this nothing – everywhere and nowhere – this creature of lace and feathers proved 'how divine a thing/ a Woman may be made'.<sup>101</sup>

### **I swim like a fish**

Malibran perpetuated an image not dissimilar. She too had une qualité vaporeuse, although in her case the fragments which came together could not be so easily reassembled. Unlike Sontag, Malibran had a wildness about her, an organisation that did violence to the poise of her profession. In a letter to her first husband in 1827, Malibran described her daily activities as a mish-mash: 'I eat like an Ogres, I drink like a drunkard, I run like a deer, I swim like a fish, I sing like a siren, I ride horseback like Napoleon (the late) and I sleep like a woodchuck'.<sup>102</sup> Not so much diffuse as divided, Malibran's constitution pulled apart into violently dissonant registers. Rather than disintegrating, her voice painted in stark, acerbic colours – she had a way of altering her tone timbrally, shifting between tessiture and shading it to suit her parts. She seemed 'polyglossic'. Her popularity was based not so much on her automization or vocal diffusion, as on this fleshy, painterly quality of production – a sound that made her seem dynamic and protean.

Her enthusiasm to be seen as a composite creature boiled over into her style of acting. In April 1829, the Times was struck by 'the frantic terror' of her Desdemona (played on 25 April) in the second scene of Act Two: 'Again we find her in transports of an ungovernable despair, falling on her knees, dragging herself in that position

<sup>100</sup> The Athenaeum 28 (7 May 1828), 437. This passage was extracted from Edward Holmes, A Ramble among the Musicians of Germany, giving some account of the Operas of Munich, Dresden, Berlin, etc. (London, 1828).

<sup>101</sup> From 'To a Young Lady/ Who had been reproached for taking long walks in the country' (1805); see Literary Magnet or Monthly Journal of the Belles Lettres (Jan. 1826), 21. Walter Benjamin writes about this tendency in a tangent to his discussion of the first Paris arcade, the Passage de l'Opéra. This was a wood construction opened in 1821 as a response to the dangers of the narrow streets around the theatre. He writes: 'The detailing of feminine beauties so dear to the poetry of the Baroque, a process in which each single part is exalted through a trope, secretly links up with the image of the corpse. This parcelling out of feminine beauty into its noteworthy constituents resembles a dissection, and the popular comparisons of bodily parts to alabaster, snow, precious stones, or other (mostly inorganic) formations makes the same point'; Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 79.

<sup>102</sup> In a letter to Eugene dated 'Monday night, 1827'; see Bushnell, Maria Malibran: A Biography of a Singer, 39.

over the stage to excite her father's pity, tearing her hair, and abandoning herself to all the excesses of an ungovernable grief'. In September, the same correspondent attacked her 'loose and unsettled' style, writing that her Desdemona 'resorts to all those shifts of low mimicry, such as running from one side of the theatre to the other, falling on her knees, tearing her hair, dragging herself over the stage with shrieks of anguish and despair, rolling about, scratching the walls with her nails, and so forth'.<sup>103</sup> Clawing at walls and walking on knees, Malibran predisposed herself to criticism as dispersed, lowbrow and *en vogue*. Audiences, in general, found her 'shuddering' to look at. 'The servility of [Malibran's imitation of Pasta's Desdemona]', the *Times* concluded, 'was slightly covered by some deviations in the style of the melodramatic exhibitions at the Boulevard Theatres'.<sup>104</sup>

Imitating these crude forms, Malibran apparently signed towards her own nondescript sense of self. She was prone to bouts of hysteria, and her doctors struggled to make sense of her fainting fits and periodic catalepsies. Those in the know speculated that she suffered from 'la bougette', an inability to keep still. In *A Travers Chants*, Berlioz described an incident in which, during a concert performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, she had to be carried from the auditorium suffering convulsions.<sup>105</sup> Not so much hyperactive as formless, Malibran, as a Milanese newspaper made clear, was of spurious human parentage 'not descended from Adam':

La Malibran is neither beautiful nor ugly; she has something not descended from Adam, something that is the result of what we wish and imagine. Everyone sees her differently. She has a face that is rather elongated, but delightfully so, a nose that is almost aquiline, a mouth immense in delight, and two great big flashing black eyes that a nail couldn't put out.<sup>106</sup>

What made Malibran's style reminiscent of Sontag's *gazouillement indéterminé* was this shapelessness, although hers was of a deep, impenetrable order that seemed – as in this passage – to lodge in her eyes.<sup>107</sup> She became an altogether different creature in the imagination of each of her spectators.

<sup>103</sup> See *The Times* (27 April 1829), 2f and *The Times* (14 September 1829), 6e.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Berlioz, *The Art of Music and Other Essays (A Travers Chants)*, 3–4.

<sup>106</sup> See *L'Eco* 28 November 1834; quoted in Bushnell, *Maria Malibran: A Biography of a Singer*, 179.

<sup>107</sup> This fascination with eyes extended to Sontag too: 'Mademoiselle Sontag! – Yes, Mademoiselle Sontag! – We are actually about to inflict a few sobering remarks on the reader respecting this lovely import... Her hair is light and elegant, and her floating eyes – 'Oh! they resemble/ Blue water lilies,

Singing, for her, was like internal combustion. Simply adorned in white with jet-black hair falling over her shoulders, she took the stage as an evanescent, or better incandescent, object. Sound seemed to pass through her transparent frame, insinuating itself into her pale features. Its passage did not leave her unscathed. Lamartine wrote of 'her beauty, which shone through her frail tissue like light through alabaster. One felt that one was in the presence of a being whose fabric had been eaten away by the sacred fire of art'.<sup>108</sup> She seemed to be burning, as if her insides were raked over by flames. As her voice rolled and unrolled, her flesh appeared to melt and fall from her. What most accounted for the pallor of her complexion was the ecstasy she experienced when she opened her mouth. Her apparent permeability, in other words, was precisely what spurred the debilitation of her internal organisation. Doctors agreed that her hyper-stimulated nervous system was exacerbating the steady corrosion of her form. Her constitution seemed to fester with music, as though the notes she had sung were lodging within her. She could not escape her vocation. Singing killed her. Shortly before midnight on Friday, 23 September 1836, Malibran breathed her last.

As in life, her illness and death became a spectacle. Since her final concert a week previously, crowds had gathered beneath her bedroom window every evening to support her struggle against fate. Her swansong had already taken on legendary status. It had been electric. Alongside the soprano Maria Caradori (Sontag had since retired) she had sung a duet from Mercadente's *Andronico* at a festival in Manchester. Despite her failing health and the conductor's protestations, she had taken the stage a second time to respond to the ovation. Vowing to 'annihilate' her singing rival once and for all, she ended the encore by repeating a high B-flat trill, holding it for a terrible length. The audience was transfixed and rose immediately as she came to a cadence. There was a deafening roar as she staggered out to the wings, collapsed and, with terrifying shrieks, began to lose consciousness. A week later she was dead. Within days the crowds would be clamouring to see her corpse.

What was prized in her voice in the years leading up to this 'perfect' concert was a certain 'morbidezza' – a fleshy, heavy or deathly kind of vocalisation that slowed down the vocal line and imparted a nervous edge to the sound. Malibranists

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when the breeze/ Is making the stream around them tremble!' see *The News* (15 April 1828) (A copy of this can be found in the 1828 file for the King's Theatre in the Enthoven Collection, Theatre Museum, London).

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in April Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran, Diva of the Romantic Age*, 91.

came in their thousands precisely to witness the inner consumption of her form, to hear her wasting away – to take part in solemn ritual. What greater spectacle than to watch music eating her from within?

Malibran, more than any other singer, approximated to the accolade most often heaped on Pasta: that she was 'encyclopaedic'. But Malibran took her forerunner's comprehensiveness to deeper levels. In 1823, Stendhal had famously praised Pasta for 'both her voices', her ability to sing passages in both head and chest tones. Because her tone was 'not all moulded from the same metallo', he repeated, she had 'two voices'.<sup>109</sup> Following the teachings of her father, Manuel García, Malibran developed similar subdivisions: the ability to alternate between a sombre or covered tone where the larynx remained fixed; and a clear sonority where the larynx followed the voice in its ascent. The idea of a partitioned voice, of cultivating different vocal registers physiologically, was only just beginning to be explored in the 1820s: García in Italy, Bennati in France and Rusch in England. Important changes were taking place in the history of the voice as its mechanism was categorized in terms of biological and anatomical process. The voice was being cut up: types of phonation (voce di petto, voce di mezzo petto, sons grave, la voix laryngienne, sons aigus, la voix surlaryngienne, voix mixte); styles of singing (canto spianato, canto fiorito, canto declamato, canto di agilità, canto di maniera, canto miniato, canto di bravura) and taxonomies of singer (soprani-sfogati, soprani parfaits, soprani-acuti, lyric sopranos, coloratura sopranos, etc.). Everything vocal was being categorised, if only to underline the sense that the voice was no longer a unit in itself, that it had subsections and acoustic regions: a whole geography of parts.

If Pasta had two voices; then Malibran – famously – had three. In practice, this meant that her extraordinary range geared her for the job of three categories of singer. Her versatility convinced the impresario Edouard Robert, for one, to write to Carlo Severini on 22 September 1829 imploring him to use any means necessary to land her for his principal concern, the Théâtre Italien. He pleaded with his co-director in the strongest of terms:

Il nous la faut absolument et coûte que coûte, car enfin elle nous tiendra les trois emplois, soprano serioe [sic] et buffo et contralto, et

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<sup>109</sup> Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, trans. Richard N. Coe (London, 1985, orig. 1823), 354–83.

comme talent il faut bien mettre dans la tête qu'elle est unique dans le monde.<sup>110</sup>

[We need her absolutely and at all costs, because in point of fact she fills three roles, serious soprano, buffo and contralto, and as for talent you really have to keep in mind that she is unique in the world.]

Bellini embellished Robert's observation to explain why she lived three times as intensely as any of her contemporaries. In a letter of 27 February 1835 to her, he wrote:

I adore you and your miraculous talent, as well as your graceful and lively person, not to mention your three souls (because you have that many, and not one like all other women).<sup>111</sup>

At the time of her burial in Belgium around 1843, her second husband, Bériot, erected a small mausoleum with a statue of her by Geefs. As expected, the sculptor depicted her, not as herself, but as one of her most famous alter egos, Norma. Again, she seemed unknowable as Maria. Lamartine contributed the poetry, basing his Alexandrine verse on Bellini's three souls motif:

Beauté, génie, amour furent son nom de femme,  
Ecrit dans son regard, dans son Coeur, dans son voix,  
Sous trois formes au ciel appartenait cette âme.  
Pleurez, terre, et vous cieux, accueillez-la trios fois.<sup>112</sup>

[Her name as a woman was beauty, genius, love,  
Written into her eyes, her Heart, and her voice,  
This soul belonged to heaven under three forms.  
Cry, earth, and you heavens, welcome her three times.]

To this day, thanks to Lamartine, Malibran's disparate sense of self remains etched onto her tombstone.

## Duplicity

Sontag and Malibran do more than just divide within themselves. Experienced as a pair, they disperse to the point of breaking into each other. As I have argued, the order of vocality they represent, on a somatic level, implies a replication of bodies. The mode of subjectivity in which they express themselves presents a scene not so much of duplication as of duplicity – and 'duplicitous' is an important word here.

<sup>110</sup> See Albert Soubies, *Le Théâtre-Italien de 1801 à 1913* (Paris, 1913), 44.

<sup>111</sup> In a 27 Feb 1835 letter now in the Brussels Conservatory. April Fitzlyon, *Maria Malibran, Diva of the Romantic Age*, 190–1.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.



She is twice. Her coupling suggests three things: that her voice is split (she forks in two); that she is without site (she lacks a starting point); and that she is not only herself. As she relocates back and forth, sound passes through a dual system of mediation – a stereophonic one – on its way to the listener. There is a strong sense of arbitration, a blocking off of the source; one must look beyond, behind or to the side of the voice to find its true significance, the communicants themselves being a non-origin – fictional and insubstantial. With this emerging species of voice, meanings refuse to stand still. In the face of such an impressive vocal apparatus, the listener is witness only to traces, lost origins and late references. Music, here, takes on the significance of a reminiscence (a *souvenir*), this modern sense that it is only at the very moment that it has passed by that it begins to mean anything.

Yet, for all this, we can easily become too embroiled in the details of the dispersed quality of Sontag's and Malibran's song, and miss the overall impression of their power. For the first time, the tones they produce are not mere social ornaments as they were earlier in the 1820s. No longer will the voice be prized for its 'finish', 'polish', 'completeness' or 'purity' as it was in the age of the contralto or the castrato earlier in the century. Rather, the voice now has a 'charge'; it is shocking. Le Globe responded to the first time Sontag and Malibran ever sung 'Ebben: a te ferisci' by marvelling at their electricity:

Il ne nous reste à parler que des duos avec Semiramide, mais il serait difficile de décrire l'effet qu'ils ont produit. L'auditoire était électrisé: Mademoiselle Sontag faisait admirer sa belle voix, Madame Malibran son expression, sa verve dramatique, et les ressources de son imagination répandue dans des points d'orgue d'une nouveauté et d'une originalité ravissantes.<sup>113</sup>

[All that remains is to talk about Semiramide's duos, but it would be difficult to describe the effect produced. The audience was electrified: Mademoiselle Sontag had us admire her beautiful voice, Madame Malibran, her expression, her dramatic verve, and the richness of her imagination which infused *fermatas* with ravishing novelty and originality.]

The press had similar reactions in the Argyll Rooms, for example at the concert for Velluti's benefit on 9 June:

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<sup>113</sup> Le Globe 7/24 (1829), 190.

The Concert closed with Rossini's *Ebben a te ferisci*, by Sontag and Malibran, which had a truly electrifying effect, and sent the company away in ecstasy.<sup>114</sup>

Such descriptions of an 'electrified' audience were rare before the Sontag-Malibran mania. Their success prepared for such statements as these (in the 1840s), by the great proto-feminist, Margaret Fuller:

The electrical, magnetic element in woman has not been fairly brought out at any period.... Women of genius, even more than men, are likely to be enslaved by passionate sensibility. The world repels them more rudely, and they are of weaker bodily frame.

Those who seem overlaid with electricity, frighten those around them. 'When she enters the room, I am what the French call *hérissé*', said a man of petty feelings and worldly character of such a woman, whose depth of eye and powerful motion announced the conductor of the mysterious fluid.... Such women are the great actresses, the songsters.<sup>115</sup>

It was in the late 1820s that critics first begin to notice preconditions at work behind voices, nervous systems, a corporeality, 'depth of eye', resistance, character, something uncontrolled, an involuntary force. Their sound has a biology, a patina, a grain, metallo and, most crucially, a gender. In every way, this powerful voice that is diffuse, embodied, polyglossic and that will flare up and supersede that of the castrato or contralto musico is decidedly female. To make this clear, here is Irigaray on the subject position of modern woman:

Experienced as all-powerful where 'she' is most radically powerless in her indifferenciation. Never here and now because she is that everywhere elsewhere from whence the 'subject' continues to draw his reserves, his re-sources, yet unable to recognize them/her. Not uprooted from matter, the earth, the mother, and yet, at the same time dispersed.... Woman remains this nothing at all [*ce rien du tout*], this whole of nothing yet [*ce tout de rien encore*] where each (male) one comes to seek the means to replenish resemblance to self (as) to same. And so she is displaced.... That sex (of) nothing at all in its absolute fluidity, its plasticity to all metamorphoses, its ubiquity in all its compossibilities, its invisibility.... All water must become a mirror, all seas, a glass.... Everything, then, should be rethought in terms of volute(s), helix(es), diagonal(s), spiral(s), curl(s), turn(s), revolution(s), pirouette(s).<sup>116</sup>

<sup>114</sup> *The Courier* 11,719 (10 June 1829), 3c.

<sup>115</sup> Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Larry J. Reynolds (New York, 1998), 61.

<sup>116</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'Volume without Contours', Margaret Whitford, ed., *Irigaray Reader* (Oxford, 1991), 53-68.

This sense of woman as electrically overwhelming (everything and nothing) became suspect after 1829. Already at the 8 June Philharmonic Concert, Edward Holmes showed disdain for the Sontag-Malibran 'Ebben, a te: ferisci': 'Defend us from a contest for the supremacy of roulades between two fashionable lady singers! The harlequinade of both was clever – the notes clearly touched, the intonation exact, the graces and decorations well remembered; but if the end of music be answered by such singing as this, music is despicable'.<sup>117</sup> After hearing Bellini's *I Capuleti e I Montecchi* two years later in Florence, Berlioz recorded his contempt for the convention of 'two feminine voices ... produc[ing] those successions of thirds'. He attributed their popularity to the Italian 'public of sybarites, who were attracted by sweet sonorities as children by lollipops'.<sup>118</sup> In Gautier's gothic extravaganza 'Albertus', a long poem set in 1829 and published as the climax to *Poésies* a year later, the hero is seduced by a hideous witch-turned-enchantedress. In transfigured form, her eyes are described as 'almond-shaped, at times most German in their sweetness tender, at times flaming with Spanish heat; two glorious mirrors of jet that make one wish to gaze within them one's whole life long'. The panegyric continues: 'Her voice's tone more sweet than nightingale's lay; Sontag and Malibran, whose every note doth thrill and in the heart awake a secret note ... a miracle, a dream of Heaven!'. This double-woman led to damnation, as Gautier's hero finds when the creature 'melts' beneath him while he is making love to her. 'A foul hag with green eyes' materialises: 'Her bones showed plain under withered breasts, and her ribs stuck out of her sides'.<sup>119</sup>

The culture of display and sensibility at its height in the late 1820s was exposed as duplicitous in these terms. The lie of the past revealed, so a new, dangerous type of nervous electricity, a smouldering intensity in the solo voice emerged from the wreckage of glorious deception. The *melodie lunghe* of the ill-

<sup>117</sup> *The Atlas* IV/151 (14 June 1829), 96.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted and discussed in Heather Hadlock, 'The Career of Cherubino or the Trouser Role Grows Up' in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton University Press, 2000), 67–92, 73.

<sup>119</sup> Gautier's assessment of the Sontag-Malibran stereotype is extreme. The witch revealed, the hero is propelled into hell. The fullness of the past broken, he witnesses a 'wondrous symphony' played by 'virtuosi with their dried, thin fingers made the strings of the Stradivarii sing again. Souls seemed to sound in the voices of the grave; cavernous gongs like thunder rumbled'. Responding to a sneeze in the audience with 'God bless you', he is attacked by devils, and the story ends: 'On that morn, near Rome, peasants found upon the Appian Way the body of a man stone dead, his back broken, his neck twisted'; see Théophile Gautier, 'Albertus, or the Soul and Sin', in *The Works of Théophile Gautier*, trans. Agnes Less ed. F.C. de Sumichrast, 24 vols (London: George Harrap, 1903), xxiv, 217–279, 227, 270 and 279.

fated heroine in white harboured a meaning that was not so much to be enjoyed, as penetrated. Lacking its partner, her solitary voice cried out for interpretation, disclosure. Enchanting and doomed, she withheld significance; she suffered from an operatic symptom that longed for diagnosis, analysis. Rather than overpowering, the 1830s woman was absorbing, lacking, without fullness, without virtuosic meaning: plain, impenetrable, alone, enigmatic – Malibran without Sontag.

## Souvenir: Parting Thoughts

The chord, the harp's full chord is hushed,  
The voice hath died away,  
Whence music, like sweet waters, gushed,  
But yesterday.

The wakened note, the breeze-like swell,  
The full o'ersweeping tone,  
The sounds that sighed 'Farewell! farewell!'  
Are gone – all gone.

Mrs Hemans in Friendship's Offering<sup>1</sup>

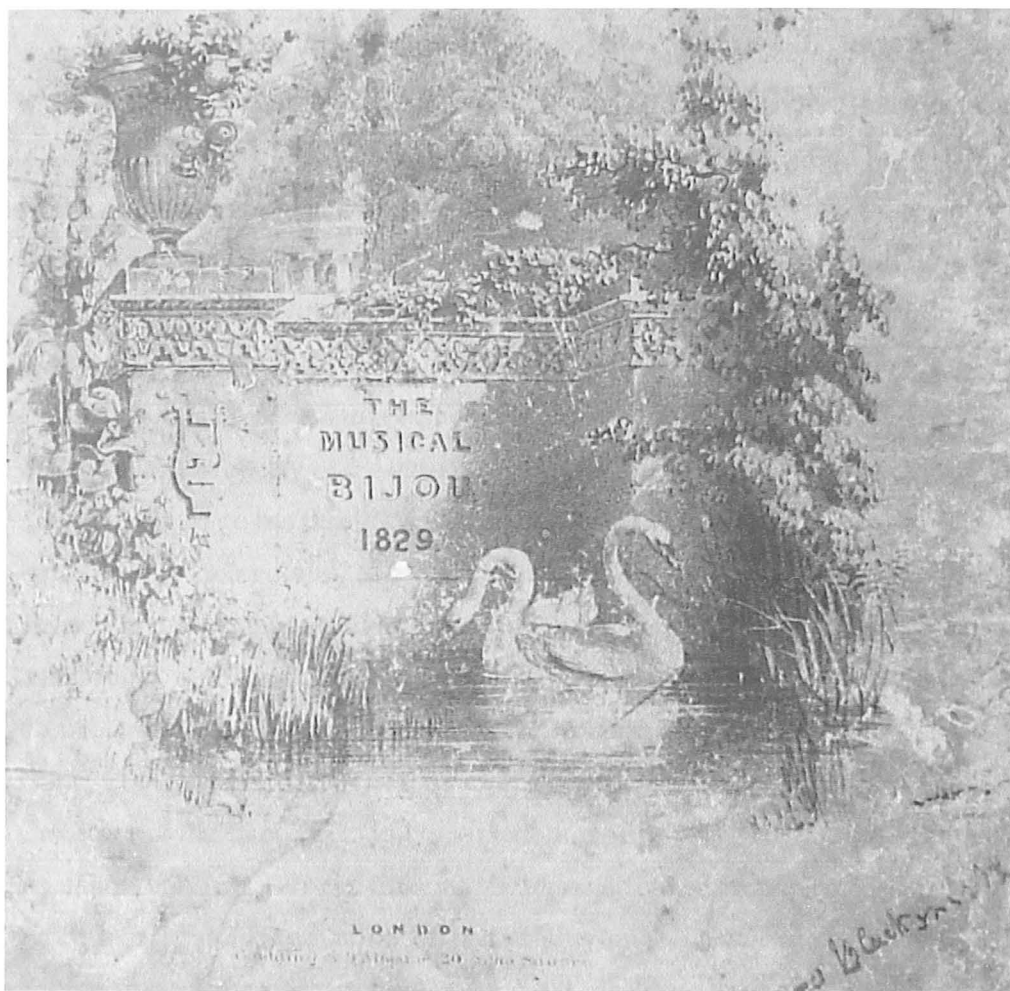


Plate 18. Julia Oakley's copy of The Musical Bijou: An Album of Music, Poetry and Prose for 1829 (London), cover illustration; Pendlebury Library of Music, Cambridge.

<sup>1</sup> Felicia Dorothea Hemans, 'Music of Yesterday', Friendship's Offering: A Literary Album and Christmas and New Year's Present for 1829 (London, 1829), 6.



## Julia's gift

The Pendlebury Library of Music in Cambridge has a faded silver volume in its care, quarto with worn gilt edges. The cover illustration, now difficult to make out, depicts two swans. They swim beneath a stone parapet mounted by latticework and an urn of flowers. Against a stucco wall and to the left of a bas-relief lyre are the engraved letters 'The Musical Bijou 1829'. The name of the publishers responsible for the jacket and its contents are in smudged type beneath: 'London Goulding and D'Almaine 20, Bond Street', a firm notorious for the prolificacy of its publications. As you open their volume, 'The Lady of Kienart Tower' greets you. This foolscap lithograph, dog-eared and not particularly inspired, is affixed with a stanza of poetry. The words describe 'the Lady' donned in 'her richest weed' greeting a Champion Knight, who sits on his steed, 'scornful and cold'. In ink, on the inside cover, a handwritten address and name can just be made out: 'Julia Oakley, Lydart House'. The printed title page follows: 'The Musical Bijou: an Album of Music, Poetry and Prose', the editor listed as 'F. H. Burney': a misleading pseudonym, since this was not the great novelist-diarist Fanny Burney, but Thomas Mackinlay, a nephew and future working partner of the publisher Thomas D'Almaine. Overleaf again, and there is a 'presentation plate', a novelty page not often encountered before 1829. Here, the item's owner is confirmed in handwritten cursive. This time, she is adorned with tendrils and cherubs: 'Julia Eliza Oakley, the gift of her mother, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1829'.<sup>2</sup>

It seems intrusive to continue, but there is nothing else for it. This book was originally the property of the eldest daughter of Elizabeth Oakley. If baptism records are anything to go by, the gift was given to mark the girl's tenth birthday. She received it at their country home in the hills near Monmouth in South Wales.<sup>3</sup> Julia already had five younger siblings, her father being described in census reports as a 'gentleman' with a number of servants in his care. He and his family held an estate on the lands of the Duke of Beaufort. In 1829, Beaufort was none other than Charles Henry Somerset (1767–1831) – the same Somerset who had, until recently, been Governor of the Cape of Good Hope (sent home on charges of mismanagement and sexual misconduct.) We can imagine the ten-year-old sitting down to play the Scottish-style 'dolce andantino' on page eighty-one. The words, by Edward Fitzball,

<sup>2</sup> F. H. Burney: Thomas Mackinlay, ed., *The Musical Bijou. An Album of Music, Poetry and Prose for 1829* (London, 1828). Mackinlay had at least two musical annuals in circulation in 1830 and 1831; see Thomas Mackinlay, ed., *The Musical Forget Me Not for 1831* (London, 1830).

<sup>3</sup> See Michael Troy Baptisms, 1801–1840.

picture two elderly gentlemen reminiscing about past times. The composer of 'Pledge me from brim to brim' was George Rodwell, the very same who had collaborated on the Flying Dutchman. Of all the contributions to the Bijou, the critics picked out Rodwell-Fitzball's for its 'point', 'spirit', 'simplicity' and 'unaffected ease'.<sup>4</sup>

The Musical Bijou was the first of its type, the earliest in a long line of musical annuals – a vastly popular genre ignored in latter-day music scholarship. (The literary equivalent, the prose or poetry annual, by contrast, has received more than its fair share of serious critical attention.)<sup>5</sup> The Harmonicon described the Bijou as 'a publication that may claim the merit of being the first-born of musical annuals', although it admitted that another 'complete failure' had preceded it. This 'disaster', issued by the London firm, Tilt, must have been the Musical Souvenir for 1829 – a pocketbook in crimson silk that was, they said, 'soon forgotten by the few who happened to open it'.<sup>6</sup>

Within the year, two further musical yearbooks appeared, (the Musical Souvenir having collapsed after too few copies were sold to defray the expense of the cover).<sup>7</sup> This was apart from the Musical Bijou for 1830, the preface of which explained how the 'very favourable' reception of the original had 'induced the Proprietors to make every exertion in the production' of a second.<sup>8</sup> The follow-up Bijou cultivated a pungent French flavour, as if to be true to its name. It included a poem by Edward Fitzball, 'Parlez bas!', extracted Matilde's second act romance 'Sombres forêt' from Rossini's Guillaume Tell and concluded with a set of quadrilles from the same opera. On 1 November 1829, a rival Musical Gem, a Souvenir arrived on the shelves, issued by an unlikely pair: Bochsa and Quaker writer William Ball (no relation of Fitzball). The editors of this splendid yellow satin volume gave suitable prominence to dances (Bochsa, after all, composed mostly for ballet): waltzes, a set of galoppes, quadrilles, and a gallopade with variations for harp and piano, many based on themes from Marschner's Der Vampyr. Bochsa's score celebrated the year in style by leading with two 'memoirs', each adorned with a lithographic portrait.

<sup>4</sup> See The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 42.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Judith Pascoe, 'Poetry as Souvenir: Mary Shelley in the Annuals', Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran, ed., Mary Shelley and Her Times (Baltimore, 2000), 173–84, or Jill Rappoport, 'Buyer Beware: The Gift Poetics of Letitia Elizabeth Landon', Nineteenth-Century Literature 58/4 (2004), 441–73.

<sup>6</sup> The Harmonicon 7 (January 1829), 27.

<sup>7</sup> The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 301.

<sup>8</sup> F. H. Burney (Thomas Mackinlay), ed., The Musical Bijou. An Album of Music, Poetry and Prose for 1830 (London, 1829), n. p. Annuals were generally compiled for the new year, which means they carried a date for the year following publication.

One depicted Malibran, the other Sontag; the text reminded readers of the operatic roles they had played during the season. In his *Biographie universelle*, Fétis – who was in London for the 1829 season – wrote that he would always treasure *le souvenir* ‘of two great talents in different genres; the one grand, sublime, fantastic, and sometimes unequal; the other, less elevated, but pure, perfect in her execution, and always guided by a delicate taste’.<sup>9</sup> The *Gem* did precisely that; it codified the memory of these singers by presenting their kinship as a material object for sale. Two commissioned songs by Malibran featured later: ‘Chagrin d’Amour, or Le Retour de la Tyrolienne’ and a tender setting of Byron’s ‘I saw thee weep’ (dedicated to Hullmandel Bartholomew). On page sixty-one, a waltz in A flat attributed to Beethoven appeared, transposed into F and set to text by Ball – ‘to its injury’ as far as William Ayrton was concerned.<sup>10</sup> Opposite was the picture of a moonlit scene and a troubadour sitting beside a lake. The lithographer was Thomas Mann Baynes, the same who had designed and painted the cavernous panorama at the heart of the Steadman’s ‘African Glen’. The *Harmonicon* seemed particularly perturbed by Bochsa’s dances: ‘The *galoppes* we are told are new; and certainly are as much so, as any thing that M. Bochsa ever does’.<sup>11</sup>

The last musical annual to be published before the end of 1829 was intended for the new year. It was a sumptuous work of nearly two hundred pages. The *Athenaeum* found the inaugural *Apollo’s Gift, or the Musical Souvenir* to be an artefact of ‘the highest possible talent, beauty and interest’. It was the joint effort ‘of three of the principal houses in the musical trade’: Chappell, Muzio Clementi and J. B. Cramer.<sup>12</sup> The *Spectator* mused that as far as annuals were concerned, there was ‘considerable diversity in the species’. In this case, however, ‘the genus is music’.<sup>13</sup> Clementi’s unequivocally musical annual, in other words, eschewed literary content. Amidst its myriad offerings was the vocal number, ‘Could’st thou but know’, words by Lady Caroline Lamb, music by the Duke of Marlborough (George Spencer-Churchill), both of whom had been prominent in the audience when Velluti made his debut in London. Mendelssohn also appeared, having offered a version of his op. 8, no. 5, already published in Berlin, to be set to words by *Musical Gem* editor, Ball (as

<sup>9</sup> François Joseph Fétis, ed., *Biographie universelle des musiciens, et bibliographie générale de la musique 1860–80*, 2nd edn, 8 vols (Paris, 1863), 418.

<sup>10</sup> *The Harmonicon* 7 (1829), 30.

<sup>11</sup> *The Harmonicon* 7 (1829), 33.

<sup>12</sup> *The Athenaeum* 111 (9 December 1829), 778a.

<sup>13</sup> *The Spectator* 1/77 (11 December 1829), 796b.

'The Song of the Pilgrim').<sup>14</sup> A 'Pastorale' by Moscheles, a Beethoven Vivace in D 'fitted as a quadrille', Weber's 'Romance' (using the melody from what was called his 'Queer Symphony') was mixed in with bits of Onslow, Herz, Spohr, Pixis, Cramer, Mozart, Rousseau, Kalkbrenner, to name a few. Clementi's annual, more than others, provided a comprehensive snapshot of the musical scene. The last word in the volume, inevitably, was given to Bochsa, who contributed 'a mere indifferent adaptation for harp', as the Athenaeum put it, of Rossini's plaintive 'Assisa a piè d'un salice' from the third act of Otello.<sup>15</sup> This transcription, by the way, recalled Malibran, the Times having singled out her debut performance of this aria in April as having been given 'with exquisite taste and admirable expression'.<sup>16</sup>

The annuals published in 1829, in other words, were a 'Who's Who' of the musical year, a compendium of the right people. They kept up with the big names, the latest trends, the newest dances, the 'best' music. They left one something to hang onto, a sense of what had been current, 'of the moment'. All profited from a pre-existing market model. Such quasi-scores exploited the well-heeled fashion, at its height in the late 1820s, for sentimental yearbooks. Annuals were miscellanies, compilations, tit-bits gathered together into fetching, saleable formats. High on style, they invited criticism for being low on content (particularly by the late 1830s). Julia's gift, for example, added five unset poems, two prose items and a comic sketch to seventeen musical compositions: twelve of them vocal, four for keyboard solo, and a quadrille. 'D'Almaine's annual', the Spectator found, 'is a sort of olio – a song and a tale, a quadrille and a picture, a glee and a sonnet, a little of everything'.<sup>17</sup> The trend towards such variety-manuals was entrenched by the time the peculiarly musical genre emerged. The first literary souvenir, extraordinarily, was offered to holiday shoppers as late as 1823. Six seasons later, such titles as Affection's Offering, The Young Ladies' Book, The Anniversary, The Cabinet of Curiosities, Winter's Wreath, The Casquet of Literary Gems, The Forget-Me-Not, The Amulet, First Flowers, Friendship's Offering or The Landscape Annual littered bookseller's shelves. Not all were to be sniffed at. The Keepsake for 1829, for example, commissioned pieces from

<sup>14</sup> This song was probably the result of an entreaty by Frederick William Collard, who had overseen the free loan of a Clementi piano to Mendelssohn during his 1829 visit. On his return from Scotland, Mendelssohn, in his own words 'asked Mr Collard to let me have it on hire this time, he sent me a few English verses and begged me to set them to music. This will be hard for me because I "must"'; see Seldon-Goth, ed., Felix Mendelssohn: Letters, 60.

<sup>15</sup> The Athenaeum 111 (9 December 1829), 778a.

<sup>16</sup> The Times (27 April 1829), 2f.

<sup>17</sup> The Spectator 1/76 (11 December 1829), 796b.

no lesser luminaries than Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Thomas Moore and Mary Shelley.<sup>18</sup> Some publishers targeted the vulnerable teen market: The Juvenile Keepsake, The Juvenile Souvenir, The Christmas Box, Ackermann's Juvenile Forget-Me-Not. Others made money out of religious sentiment: The Emanuel, A Religious Offering, Remember Me! A Token of Christian Affection, or The Iris. Still more identified special-interest groups for exploitation: The Zoological Keepsake, The Nautilus, The Souvenir litteraire de France.

**'The novelty of the passing hour'**

We recommend [Apollo's Gift, or the Musical Souvenir] to the patronage of the tasteful on more grounds than any publication of its class, where the object is merely to show the novelty of the passing hour.

Edward Holmes<sup>19</sup>

The choice offered by booksellers entailed commodification on an unprecedented scale. These keepsakes, of course, were the progeny of private albums, commonplace compilations and musical scrapbooks kept as intensely personal acts of remembrance and commemoration. In pure form, manuscript daybooks had heavily domestic or devotional functions. They were a means of reflection, a way of recording private thoughts and memories. From a critical point of view, what their emergence proffered, then, was a dilution of choice, precisely by offering the new middle-class consumer variety beyond her wildest dreams. They heralded a cultural moment where individuals no longer made memories for themselves; instead, memories were formed on their behalf. The seller seemed to ask: 'Why expend effort memorialising one's life experience, when that can be done for you?' To invest in these compilations was to buy into a collective vision of the moment, to feel as though you had gathered every thought together to hold close and cherish. What they heralded, in the critical view, was a moment where the commodity form infiltrated to the deepest level of personal reflection.

Julia's album is immediately recognisable both as a gift and a commodity. According to anthropologists, these two classes of object are not dissimilar in terms of sociological function. Arjun Appadurai reminds us that we think of gifts in terms of human qualities: reciprocity, sociability, spontaneity. Commodities, meanwhile,

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<sup>18</sup> Frederic Mansel Reynolds, ed., The Keepsake for 1829 (London, 1829).

<sup>19</sup> The Atlas IV/189 (27 December 1829), 844b.



tend to be represented in systemic and quantifiable terms: the market is profit-orientated, self-centred, calculating and measurable. 'Gifts [apparently] link things to persons and embed the flow of things in the flow of social relations', Appadurai notes, 'and commodities represent the drive ... of goods for one another, a drive mediated by money, and not by sociability'.<sup>20</sup> In his opinion, though, the gift-commodity distinction is overstated – the gap too widely drawn. Exchange and market economies operate more or less according to equivalent principles of engagement: both are sociological. It has been clear since at least Mauss (1925) that there is no such thing as a 'free gift'. Gifts bind people into commitments. Responsibility, moral duty and obligation characterise their tendering; recompense, gratitude and indebtedness their reception. Gifts are social objects, and gift-giving functions to reinforce social relations, acting in the perpetual recycling of society by stratifying interdependencies endlessly and repeatedly. A mother's role as nurturer and matriarch, for example, may be entrenched via an act of gift exchange; a daughter's familial position may be chastened by the experience of receiving.

Commodities have no less active a social life. Despite what we may think, commodity consumption is not principally an act of enjoyment. Nor do people co-opt into systems of buying and selling merely in order to survive. Survival and enjoyment (anthropologists struggle with 'enjoyment') have very little to do with the modern commodity. Rather, consumers buy into the market in order to connect, communicate. A strong social imperative underlies the modern exchange of goods. The ideology associated with the system leads people to assume, falsely in critics such as Baudrillard's view, that they are affluent, fulfilled and liberated. For him, exactly the opposite is true.<sup>21</sup>

In anthropological terms, as we have seen, exchange takes place within a closed circuit of visible relations. Everything is systemic: we may even speak of a 'sociology of sheet music'. This picture of relations being passed from hand to hand recalls Marx. His dialectical materialism theorized the first of these dehumanised worlds: a highly structured society of visible exchange. Within his economic system, a special place was figured for the commodity; Marx's critique of capital involved explaining how the commodity becomes a substitute for the social relations that lie

<sup>20</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), 11.

<sup>21</sup> See for example his discussion of how commodities bring on the fake ecstasy of salvation, in Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society. Myths and Structures* (1970) (London, 1998), 60.

behind it. Objects are invested with a deep relational significance: hence what he called their 'fetish character'. The result, as Marx would have it, is tragic. The possessor is duped into feeling intimacy: not for a person, but for an inanimate object.<sup>22</sup>

In view of this critique, the presentation of Julia's gift may be read – harshly – as a manipulative gesture: nothing more than a commodity form mediating in a parent-child relationship. Gift-giving cannot help but be controlling – this would be the position of those exponents of 'the anthropology of the mother'. The exchange of a bought object restrains fluid, qualitative exchange by quantifying value and systemising relations, which is why market economies are inflexible relative to gift economies; why their hard social strata is so permanent and unyielding. Appadurai puts it like this: 'The stable universe of capital institutes a regime for protecting status systems by restricting equivalences, exchange or social mobility'. (This is my paraphrase of him.)<sup>23</sup> In the hierarchized universe of commerce, human experience is highly mediated and abstracted. This is why the search for authenticity, for 'true' human experience, for roots, becomes vital at this time (more on this later). Modern society is virtual. In this sense, Julia's gift acts as a sign of the loss of spontaneous, reciprocal, human relations; it is an indication of the level to which commodification and the market has penetrated. Put another way, what we are looking at here – via this object of mother-daughter exchange – is the infiltration of consumer society into the home. The simulated intimacy of the bank manager or shop assistant with his client interferes in the parent-child relationship; a 'kiosk demeanour' begins to touch domestic life, fingering the closest expressions of tenderness. Even mothers and daughters are not safe.

The threat of the loss of human value in these commodities was covered over by their being bathed in a deceptive gift-giving ethos. Publishers would hide the bluntly commercial intent of their endeavours by dressing up their products as gifts. They made money by stressing the voluntary, philanthropic aspect of the annual, and by overstating each publication's uniqueness. The presentation plate played

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<sup>22</sup> Marx famously wrote in *Das Capital*: 'In [the religious] world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This I call Fetishism which attached itself to the products of labour, so as soon as they produced as commodities'; quoted in Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London, 1993), 164.

<sup>23</sup> Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, 21.

immediately into the false ideology of the gift. Such novelty pages were unfamiliar enough for them to require explanation. The Harmonicon described the particularly splendid example in the Musical Bijou for 1830 as 'a kind of arabesque scroll – a remarkably pretty design – within which the donee's [sic] name is meant to be inscribed'.<sup>24</sup> By leaving space for signatures – human marks – the annual invited particularisation or authentication. The large number of dedications it featured further widened its tone of largesse. Following the generic frontispiece of a ring of forget-me-nots, the Musical Souvenir for 1829, as an example, made a meal of its dedication to the Duchess of Gloucester. Bochsa's Musical Gem, meanwhile, offered itself ostentatiously to the Duchess of Kent. Links of friendship characterised every page of music: Malibran's canzonet 'I saw thee weep', also in the Gem, for example, was dedicated to her companion, Mrs Hullmandel Bartholomew. When musical numbers were criticised in the press, it was usually because they were felt not to be special enough to pass off as gifts. The Harmonicon attacked two pieces appearing near Malibran's on this basis: the snippet of Weber ('The Vine-dresser's song') and Beethoven-Ball's 'The Maid of Elsmere'. Since these melodies were 'in every body's hands', the argument went, they 'should not have found a place in a new work'.<sup>25</sup> The veneer of originality and individuality was indispensable to the annual's gift image.

The affective object told a lie of personalisation. It was as if the annual had been set aside solely for the purchaser. Consumer society, in fact, cultivated an aura of attentiveness: the customer buys because he or she feels loved; goods change hands in exchange for pampering, for the social bond performed between retailer and retaillee. The musical annual was only a part of the regime of spoiling. Just as the seller makes the client feel at home, so the publisher cares for the customer. There is favouring and mothering; the music selected is unique, precious and exceptional. Appearing late in 1829, Mendelssohn's 'Song of the Pilgrim' in Apollo's Gift, was marketed as one-of-a-kind, for example. The Harmonicon advertised it as 'quite a gem; not of the sparkling kind, but rich and rare and serenely beautiful'.<sup>26</sup> Exchange did not only involve a circulation of objects; social relations were in play, a politics of buying and selling, an intimate network of knowing, falsity, 'personalised' service,

<sup>24</sup> The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 301. This presentation plate is reproduced on page ii of this thesis.

<sup>25</sup> The Harmonicon 8 (1830), 30.

<sup>26</sup> The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 303.

affection and private attention. To hope for such objects, to desire them, was to yearn after the poignancy of a handing-over, to being needed.

As has been seen, we may interpret these musical annuals à la Baudrillard as an inoculation in a homeopathic dose to ward off the loss of personable or humanly real in consumer society. In the absence of true psychological attachment, the object acts as a placebo. (The buyer needs the annual because he craves a surrogate relationship with a thing held close.) The commodity offers itself to be loved; it is a placeholder for genuine contact. As an advertisement appearing in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in 1829 put it:

The Amulet [a literary annual] may lie on the couch of the room where friends meet in health and cheerfulness, or below the pillow of the room where sickness lies afar from sorrow, and the patient feels that no medicine is better for the weakness of the body than that which soothes and tranquilizes the soul.<sup>27</sup>

The palliative effect of the commodity, in other words, was felt merely as a result of being close to it. The idea was that the annual was not to be experienced alone, but in familiar association with (imagined) companions. The meaninglessness of its pages was of little consequence. The numbing effect of flipping through the annual was in fact part of its appeal; it was the guarantee of the object's sociality – these were not books of connoisseurship or scholarship to be experienced in lonely solitude. The irony was that whilst the objects were meant to be shared amongst friends in comfort and relaxation (one had bought into an imagined community by owning them), they usually ended up being nested away at home. Annuals seemed amenable to being stored in one's chest of memories, hidden away and cherished.

The annual's gift ethos was further enhanced by its profusion of content. 'Free' extras were everywhere. Bochsa advertised his Gem as 'elegantly bound in White and Yellow Satin Paper and Blue Morocco, with Gold Device and Gilt Edges ... embellished with six highly-finished Lithographs [and] drawings on India Paper'.<sup>28</sup> It was as if you could possess the whole world between two covers. Every big-name composer featured: Beethoven, Mozart, Hummel, Weber, Mendelssohn, Spohr. Music, poetry, engravings and prose: the commodity seemed to be made of everything special. The emotion when paging through the annual was analogous to that felt when browsing the arcades, or perusing the new shopping malls:

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Pascoe, 'Poetry as Souvenir: Mary Shelley in the Annuals', 176.

<sup>28</sup> The Harmonicon 7 (1829), 301.

anticipation, expectancy and exaltation. To read the contents page was to be showered in manna. The ideal attitude of engagement with these scores, in every case, was one of pious thankfulness.

In accordance with its abundance, the musical annual took the shape of 'the consumer package'. It conformed to a cultural type that came into its own around this time: hampers, box sets, pre-wrapped gifts, individual packaging, beauty ensembles, sewing kits, multi-pack lotions, collected editions, musical miscellanies, travel-size toiletries, sweet boxes, three-in-one shampoos and ready-made meals. The impression was that someone had chosen a range of select and complementary items on your behalf. Once gathered, each morceau took on the sense of having being picked out according to specific customer needs. Critics such as Edward Holmes at the Atlas might complain about inconsistency, as in Julia's Musical Bijou: 'At one page we have a horrid story of a young lady kneeling down on the sea beach, and dying with her mouth wide open; and over leaf, instead of finding a requiem for the repose of her soul, we find an andantino looking rather merry upon the catastrophe'.<sup>29</sup> But whatever its drawbacks, this coterie of floating signifiers was not randomly collected: they had been gathered together by an affectionate and loving hand. The publisher had produced his annual not for his own purposes, but as a magnanimous social gesture. The preface of Bochsa's Musical Gem hoped that:

The selection of original productions from Composers of acknowledged eminence and talent, will be deemed not to have been unsuccessfully combined, in 'thoughts and remembrance fitted' [Shakespeare] for the gentle service of Friendship and the Muse, as another Lyrical Souvenir.<sup>30</sup>

The ready-made collection, perhaps because of its conviviality, was imbued with a soft feminine charm. This era saw the gendering of this particular form of 'profusion collecting', a practice now related to the delicacy and effeminacy of the miniature. As the Spectator wrote of Clementi's Apollo's Gift: 'On the whole we may recommend this work to our fair readers. For their especial use it was designed, and their especial patronage it may fairly claim'.<sup>31</sup> Women, in other words, were drawn to bricolage and annuals, because they themselves were imagined to be gift-like. In this sense, the mother-daughter gift-exchange might be interpreted (in extreme Lévi-

<sup>29</sup> The Atlas 3/134 (7 December 1828), 781a.

<sup>30</sup> William Ball and Nicolas Bochsa, ed., The Musical Gem: A Souvenir for 1830 (London, 1829), n. p.

<sup>31</sup> The Spectator 76 (11 December 1829), 797.



Straussian language) in terms of the incest taboo, since the most basic form of gift-giving in society involved the exchange of women in marriage. (The prohibition of next-of-kin marriage makes women available for circulation.) Why else would eligible debutantes of the 1820s so surround themselves with gifts? Why would they beautify themselves with so many ribbons, gems, ornaments, trinkets, etc? By placing themselves in the vicinity of these objects, by gift-wrapping themselves, by hoarding presents, they prepared socially for being handed over themselves.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps this was why sentimental yearbooks depended so utterly on themes of loss, although the melancholy of the year-end must have held weight here. Tales of parting, tears, and grief together with scenes of mortality and death characterised these mementos of parental or familial affection. Leave-taking was the central motif of the keepsake aesthetic. The contributions of poet Caroline Bowles to the 1830 issues bear this out. The Gem – an annual that the Atlas found ‘possesses intrinsic value, and sparkles with rare and brilliant hues’ – featured her ‘To Death’;<sup>33</sup> and the Literary Souvenir her ‘The Dying Mother to her Infant’. The Gem of 1829, meanwhile, published Walter Scott’s ‘The Death of Keeldar’ alongside another derivative, ‘On an Infant dying as soon as Born’, by Caroline Lamb. And yet the effect of such a profusion of sorrow was not so much the sentimentalisation of death, as its neutralisation. The softly macabre undertone of these books had a way of making even the End, the ultimate authentic reality, seem banal.

Perpetual longing for true contact, nostalgia for the real, was at the heart of the annual aesthetic. In the face of mass reproduction, the veneer of authenticity made these publications meaningful. Motives of loss found extraordinary expression in Apollo’s Gift, which appeared in early December 1829. Inserted into the back of Clementi’s annual, in the manner of missing tokens, were five autograph facsimiles (made possible by new advances in lithography). Weber’s ‘first sketches for Opera of Oberon’ began the series. This reproduced what the Spectator called ‘the germ of his original adaptation of “I revel in hope”; which as well as the last movement in his “O tis a glorious sight”; he consented to alter at the suggestion of [singer John] Braham’.<sup>34</sup> Next came a page of Mozart, an ‘Andantino für Clavier’ with the

<sup>32</sup> Lévi-Strauss’ notion has become particularly popular in ‘woman-as-commodity’ feminist studies; see, for example, Irigaray, This Sex Which is Not One, 170.

<sup>33</sup> The Atlas IV/185 (29 November 1829), 780b.

<sup>34</sup> The Spectator 77 (19 December 1829), 807b.

signature 'André', an early collector of Mozart autographs, visible.<sup>35</sup> Specially written for the annual was Clementi's 'Canon ed Diapason for the Piano Forte, composed and dedicated to J. B. Cramer by his friend', dated 1829. The *Athenaeum* described this facsimile as 'in the legato style [and] exhibiting considerable erudition'. A sample of Haydn followed: a short three-part canon or 'Musical Puzzle', to be read both right-side up and upside down. Beethoven's 'contribution' appeared as the three-page final insert: an 'Andante' in G minor, which, as the *Athenaeum* wrote, 'presents a highly characteristic specimen of calligraphy and composition'.<sup>36</sup>

These facsimiles had all the aura and feeling of originals and yet were simulacra. The *Athenaeum* spoke of the 'enthusiastic interest and pleasure in the seeing and possessing, as it appears, the actual hand-writing of the above eminent men [sic]; for the fac-similes are so delightfully executed, that it is impossible to believe they are otherwise than the manuscripts they imitate'.<sup>37</sup> There was, in other words, no sense that these pseudo-objects lacked the transcendence or metaphysics of the originals. The aura of the rare and unique original manuscripts were, in fact, only enhanced by the development of facsimile reproduction. This is where Walter Benjamin was mistaken in his famous 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.<sup>38</sup> The plethora of exact copies did not in fact reduce the value of the authentic original; rather the sense of uniqueness seemed to repeat with every new simulation. This is why, in the new age, the search for the authentic manuscript increasingly became critical, just as the autograph became ever more priceless.

<sup>35</sup> This was Johann Anton André (1775–1842), the first great Mozart scholar, who bought the so-called 'Mozart-Nachlass' from the composer's widow, Constanze, in 1799. In 1829, he published his edition of *Die Zauberflöte* 'in precise agreement with the composer's manuscript, as sketched, completed and orchestrated by him', along with his second edition of Mozart's *Requiem*. These scores were landmarks in the history of the documentary edition; see Wolfgang Plath, 'Johann Anton André', Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 2001), 619–20.

<sup>36</sup> *The Athenaeum* 111 (9 December 1829), 778c. This was second movement of Beethoven's Sonatine op. 79, which was purchased and first published by Clementi in 1809. The autograph is now in the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn.

<sup>37</sup> *The Athenaeum* 111 (9 December 1829), 778a.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (London, 1992), 211–44.



Plate 19. The facsimile of Beethoven's op. 79 autograph inserted into the back of Clementi, Muzio and J. B. Cramer, *Apollo's Gift; or the Musical Souvenir for 1830* (London, 1829).

Edward Holmes seemed to engage in a form of proto-sketch studies when he reviewed Clementi's *Apollo's Gift*. The Mozart fragment, he noticed, was of dubious parentage:

The extract given as Mozart's (which is beyond all doubt authentic), is singularly like a theme of Gluck in the *Alceste*, so much so that it is scarcely credible but that the composer must have written a reminiscence unaware. On second observation, we are certain that Mozart can only have written this motivo as a subject from Gluck, and not as his own. The term, therefore, 'air by Mozart', is hardly correct.<sup>39</sup>

The scrutinizing tendencies of his review pointed to a fresh relation with the stand-alone original at the dawn of a reproductive market economy. A new archive fever was sweeping through museums, concert halls, theatres, libraries and homes. Unique

<sup>39</sup> *The Atlas* IV/189 (27 December 1829), 844b. The similarity between this autograph facsimile and *Alceste*'s second act aria in Gluck's Italian version of the opera is indeed striking. Mozart's autograph replicates bars 275 to 299 in 'Non vi turbate, no, pietosi Dei' almost exactly; see Christoph Willibald Gluck, *Alceste* (Weiner Fassung von 1767), ed. Gerhard Croll (Basel, 1988), 236–8.

objects were beginning to take on a mythical quality, as curatorial sentiment led connoisseurs to look for transcendence in rare, one-of-a-kind experiences. Holmes, for one, in his review of Apollo's Gift, formed a fetish of Beethoven's handwriting. A semblance of presence seemed to lurk within every ink-blot and slip of the hand:

Every part of the note is so formed as to show the impetuosity of the writer's disposition – the heads like pin's [sic], the tails long and thin, the whole made with scarce enough patience for legibility... it is interesting to see from what hasty beginnings, half-thoughts, and dim imaginings, a composer may put together a fine, consistent and lasting work.<sup>40</sup>

Holmes' words here represent the first signs of a desire to return to the beginning, to see the composer creating from nothing, to identify the germ of where things started. The irony was that such essentialism was only made possible because of a fake.

The press hailed the editors of Apollo's Gift for their foresight in publishing these facsimile case studies. In the 1831 instalment of the same annual, the publishers managed to collect nine autographs, amongst them compositions by Spohr, Mayseder and Romberg. The follow-up Musical Gem. A Souvenir for 1831, edited by Ball and Mori (Bochsa had recently been sent to prison), featured an autograph from Handel's Messiah. The Atlas wrote that it was 'most conscientious in blurs and blots, and as good as the original'.<sup>41</sup> By 1845, when the last musical annual of its era reached circulation, these facsimiles were making a glorious exit. The Musical Bijou of this year went to extraordinary lengths to produce the lie of personalisation. On behalf of the editors, one J. Brandard copied 'with slight alterations' and by permission of the trustees of The British Museum, four illuminated manuscripts (from Royal Col. 16. F.ii; Sloane 2,605 and Harleian 2,936) in order that they might be reproduced in a blaze of colour (see Plate 20).

The logic of these facsimiles, of course, related to the simulated intimacy of buying and selling. The quest for authenticity and for signs of human sociability had become key in a society where experience was increasingly mediated and abstracted. Annual doses of nostalgia, longing and interiority, in this sense, were a counterbalance to the burgeoning sense of remoteness from life – to the increasing lack of outward meaning in the modern world. What these musical annuals supplied culture was a veneer, a dummy pill. To connect with these objects was to connect

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> The Atlas V/235 (14 November 1830), 749a.

with 'live' experience, real performance, personal stories, private sentiments, close relations, motherly love and real-life composers.



Plate 20. The future of the musical annual. J. Brandard's title page, F.H. Burney, ed., *The Musical Bijou: an Album of Music and Poetry for 1845* (London, 1845), based on an illuminated manuscript (ca. 1500) in *Poems of Charles, Duke of Orleans*, executed for Elizabeth of York, The British Library, Manuscript Royal Col. 16.F.ii; Pendlebury Library of Music, Cambridge.



### The melancholy of exchange

Such an indictment of Julia's gift is overstated: a 'hard' anthropological or Marxist approach, when a sympathetic philosophical view of the gift might prove equally enlightening. On the one hand, we may view the mother-daughter bond in terms of the invasion of commodity exchange; on the other, we may take it from the perspective of the giver – that the commodity is being turned, given authenticity and, by this act of giving and receiving (this act of being signed 'Julia Eliza') humanized. We might interpret this action positively as a way of trying to reconcile one to another, daughter to mother, past to present, signified to signifier, human to human. A strong sense of recovery or restitution is in play in view of the commemorative score. But here, Julia's gift does not only survive as the trace of an authentic experience; it also represents (more heroically) a holding-on in the face of growing technological mediation, a way of forming relations outside the social scene.

This is where Derrida's 'aneconomic' model of the gift becomes valuable. Rather than conceiving of an anthropology of gift-giving, the philosophical view interprets gift-giving as an action outside social space. Gift exchange, for Derrida, is without logic – it is non-systemic. The gift is free from economic organisation or scientific representation; it cannot even be thought of in terms of resistance or subversion within discourse. Rather, the gift is unquantifiable, ineffable, always in the beyond; it is disordering, always raiding the system from the outside. For Derrida, even to recognise an object as 'a gift' is to neutralise its status as such, to annul its ontology. An offering of a gift, therefore, is equivalent to an offering of music in its neo-romantic sense. It has no sociology; it can only be thought of in terms of rupture or surplus.<sup>42</sup> As Carolyn Abbate has written of music: 'music exists in a state of unresolved alterity in relation to the visible world, or to language and words, as it is to culture and society'.<sup>43</sup> Her notion of music as immediate, profoundly relational and unalloyed is powerfully related to Derrida's philosophy of the gift. Music is only music, in this view, when it is given away.

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<sup>42</sup> Perhaps I have put this too strongly. In his book on the subject, Derrida posits the gift as an other within. It is sociologically significant, but only by way of a relation of unresolved difference. This is his typically contorted explanation: 'If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain aneconomic. Not that it remains foreign to the circle, but it must keep a relation of foreignness to the circle, a relation without relation of familiar foreignness. It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible'; see Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago, 1992), 7.

<sup>43</sup> Carolyn Abbate, 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?' *Critical Inquiry* 30/3 (2003), 505–36, 524.

The social meaning of Julia's Bijou, of course, lies somewhere between the 'hard' and 'soft' views of gift-music exchange. This mother-daughter moment in 1829 is at once systemic (informed by social norms) and ineffable (remote from modern analysis). Like any piece of music, the event has both anthropological and philosophical significance. A dialogue, in other words, is under way between alienation and intimacy. For me, the gift from Julia's mother represents a loving act of speaking tenderly – I mean here with genuine tenderness – in the 'hard' commercial terms of a mass-produced object. Both philosophical and anthropological views tend to underestimate the enormous capacity of the human to feel deeply in terms of the market, to invest her whole being in economic exchange. Philosophers tend to deny the very possibility of the system; anthropologists are too enamoured by the effects of top-down social production to appreciate the recreative potential of bottom-up consumption. All human feeling requires an expressive framework in which to operate. To say that the market provides the grounds for gift-giving is not to imply that all exchange within it lacks tenderness. The mother-daughter operates in relation to the market: both within and against it, as well as, often, outside of it. And it operates, I am sure, with profound feeling.

Let me put this another way. Though Julia's gift seems insignificant, it does preserve a strange intimacy about it. Her birthday present is, in fact, a lost object, an object out of time. It is a faded heirloom difficult to make sense of or value in today's terms (which is why it adapts so well to the modern world of second-hand music and flea-market bric-a-brac). While there may be something anodyne about its tattered pages, there is something touching about encountering Julia in this context. For her, this gift was more than the memento of the year; more than a souvenir of 1829. How well, in fact, does the annual sum up the period it sets out to represent? Her Bijou was not just about its contents – a year in music: it could not be reduced to a product for mere absorption, a score to pour over and play. Her gift meant more than can be measured by its contents (by any analysis of the terms of its production). In any case, how are we to be sure that such faith in weepy sentimentality was not deeply felt? Couldn't tearfulness be utterly 'of the period', part of the era's romantic nostalgia? In this sense, we have to take Thackeray's denunciation of these 'little gilded books' in Fraser's Magazine in 1837 with a pinch of salt:

My Lady Blessington writes a song upon the opposite page [of an engraving], about water-lily, chilly, stilly, shivering besides a

streamlet, plighted, blighted, love-beknighted, falsehood sharper than a gimlet, lost affection, recollection, cut connexion, tears in torrents, true-love token, spoken, broken, sighing, dying, girl of Florence; and so on. The poetry is quite worthy of the picture, and a little sham sentiment is employed to illustrate a little sham art.<sup>44</sup>

What these apparently sham tokens offered the human condition, pace Thackeray, was a way of tracing the flow of sentiments, of gift-wrapping a relationship in its year-historical context. They were signs of love organised so that social bonds could be renewed and reviewed annually; they recorded a yearly ticking-over, a way of capturing in material form, a time, place, feeling, intimacy, and a moment to long for.

This is why we encounter Julia's gift poignantly: because it represents a lost sociability. It has a life-history – a biography – remote from intellectual scrutiny. It is also why her volume seems 'wrong' in the Pendlebury; in fact, 'wrong' in every present. Outside of Julia's boudoir, her piano stool, cabinet, dressing-room drawer, it is a culturally useless object. It makes no sense apart from its accompanying effects: perfumes, soaps, her store of letters, ribbons, hair brushes, undergarments. We can never read its pages for what they are worth. As Susan Stewart has put it, the story of the souvenir is 'not a narrative of the object; it is a narrative of the possessor'.<sup>45</sup> We have very little access to it.

Its impenetrability is heightened further by a strange, backward-looking ethos. (The volume's contents betray a period sensibility very much of its time.) The 1820s were, after all, the decade when the modern sense that 'the past is too much with us' was first imputed into objects such as these. This was the grand era of the souvenir. (Modern postcards, photographs, tourist curios and such banalities as the 'I've been there' T-shirt all emerge from the classic commodity-souvenir: the printed annual.) Julia's gift might, in this context, be seen to preserve a moment when a mother-daughter bond finally became property, when it was stabilized and formalised via an act of exchange. The souvenir always operates in this way: it involves the safeguarding of an instant in time or, better, its privatisation, its holding close. As a materialised memory, a commemorative object, it functions as a way of

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<sup>44</sup> Part of Thackeray's invective involved identifying four different kinds of scents: scented orange-trees, scented exotics, scented water in the movable fountain, scented fire in the golden brazier. Elsewhere, he described these annuals in terms of 'a large, weak plate, done in what we believe is called the stipple style of engraving, a woman badly drawn, with enormous eyes – a tear, perhaps, upon each cheek – and an exceedingly low-cut dress – pats a greyhound, or weeps into a flower-pot, or delivers a letter'; see William Makepeace Thackeray, 'A Word on the Annuals', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and County* 16 (1837), 757–63, 758.

<sup>45</sup> Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 136.

recalling the feelings of the year. Yet it also functions as a way of forgetting: a way of reducing or itemizing a complex temporality – a moment – so that only a small, static present (a ready-to-hand object) remains. The souvenir, in other words, acts in order to fix experience in a permanent, though decaying, state of memorability.

Therefore: Julia's gift is inalienably tied to her mother; it is expressive of only one giver-receiver relation. Personalised souvenirs, once given, are difficult to return or pass on. Publishers design annuals such as these to move out of circulation; at the moment of giving, the object is meant to leave its commodity phase. On 27 April 1829, when Julia's mother signed Julia's name into her 'presentation plate', the offering lost exchange value and became 'private' and 'authentic'. The mark of her hand sealed its contents into what Stewart has called 'the delicate and hermetic world of the souvenir'.<sup>46</sup> Its inaccessibility to us, in other words, is the guarantee of its deep and genuine humanity.

### The music fades

The musical work – the thing we scrutinize for supra-audible import – in less severe terms is a souvenir, one of the things taken away from the experience of playing or listening, to contemplate, to 'put in a drawer' as a way of domesticating the experience.

Carolyn Abbate<sup>47</sup>

A number of questions arise in view of this enigmatic leftover. What might we say about this year – 1829 – when the musical form of the annual comes into circulation? Why is it precisely at this point that social bonds begin to be commemorated by the giving and receiving of sheet music? What does it mean when such compilations develop souvenir status? We are familiar today with the idea that a beloved piece of music might 'take us back', that it recalls a feeling and a date, that it is not really itself – sound in the here and now. But when can this sense of music as 'ours' (as 'particular to me') have become dominant?

I will start at the beginning. At the dawn of the Muse of Music being fixed as a commodity, she looks back; she laments her loss. In this period – around the late 1820s – the printed score acquires a nostalgia for lost authenticity; it wants to be played in 'real time'. It is as though, now that music has been tied to the market, it has alienated itself from life, from authentic experience. In this period, somewhere in

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>47</sup> Abbate, 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?', 506.

the march towards a full market economy, music appears to lose gift-status, it begins to hearken back to the conditions of an original performance, to some pre-creative moment. To put this another way: since Music has been barred from offering herself freely, She yearns after her prelapsarian state. This sense of music as backward-looking is a sense not only imparted and related to annuals. All published music since the printing press – the late 1820s just happens to mark its heyday – taps into a heavily nostalgic ethos. A profound symmetry connects these heavily commercial annuals with the first great printed editions of the nineteenth century – the first great ‘works’ (involving the musical concept that, according to Lydia Goehr, emerged around this time).<sup>48</sup> Like annuals, ‘works’ are closet souvenirs, intimately tied to the vagaries of the market.

Why is this important? Because the ‘musical work’ – the purely musical abstraction – only became possible in a modern sense by virtue of its publication, via technologies of mass reproduction. The ‘work’ is not some utopian Idea, some imaginary organic construct. (We have known for some time the dangers of this Idealist fantasy.) Rather, it is material, a notational matrix that is infinitely reproducible, ever perfect. It has a physical ontology that is never ineffable, never ungraspable; or rather, it is ineffable and ungraspable only by virtue of its mass reproduction. The higher the order of technology, the more complete the abstraction, the purer the result. Commodification is its essence. All printed music, at the precise moment it enters the commodity phase, is imbued with nostalgia, longing and a yearning for some ideal of restoration. It is at this point in the nineteenth century that history becomes important to music as never before. Musicologists begin to study its past. Critics hanker after an imagined ‘correctness’. Early music movements begin to emerge. Performers quest after some pure moment of (lost) authenticity.

Yet as if to counteract this, scores retain as much gift status as they do commodity value – a book of music is certainly more gift-like than a volume of literature. Sheet music requires not just reading, but bodily performance – manual action and personalisation. In order to be realized, in order to function, it must take on the shape of the fingers, the weight of the arm, the grain of the throat. The work requires storing, if not in a library or a piano stool, than at least in the intimate space of the possessor’s physique. Now that the volume has filled the body, as it were, it

<sup>48</sup> Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*. One ‘work-based’ publication that received attention in 1829 was Henry Purcell, *Purcell’s Sacred Music*, ed. Vincent Novello, 4 vols (London, 1828–32).



must be set aside for safe-keeping, so that the hands can continue to rehearse – allow imprinting to take place. The work must be 'lived with', memorized and made fluent. This is why scores in their early nineteenth-century sense are so gift-like; why domestication is so important to the experience of music. The name of the possessor customarily adorns the scores we pick up in libraries and second-hand sales. Fingerings are scrawled in. Dynamic markings cover the notation. Unique problems of performance are pencilled into the margin. These scores were positively prosthetic in the way they once cleaved close to the buyer's person. (This would explain their lingering sense of privacy and authenticity.) In their backward-looking stance – all scores, and all 'musical works' with them, are receipts; they validate a passed, real musical engagement. As such, in the way they exist as souvenirs, in the way they once meant something to someone, in the way they filled a life, in their poignancy, they resemble Julia's gift.

I would end here, but for one concluding paragraph. It goes without saying that a new type of historical memory was being registered in 1829 via these annuals, heavily inflected by a nostalgia for authentic situatedness. On one hand, the musical souvenir of 1829 represented public memory: a year-study (Bochsa, Fitzball, Velluti, Malibran, Steedman, Rodwell, Sontag, Mendelssohn). On the other, it encountered the year privately: as an open book, sentimental, 'for Julia'. Historically speaking, a 'public individuality' emerged via these annuals which recollected the past 'musically', in terms of indeterminate signifiers – the details of a single life-experience. The grand movements of the past, in any case, had become alienating; the individual was lost to them. Here was a history that allowed personalisation, intimacy: there were ways of interpreting it, of gift-wrapping the past such as to escape the grandiose sweep of 'outer' history. (The assumption here is that one cannot possess the past totally on one's own terms, one must at least be open to its public periods.) All in all, Julia's gift represents a way of holding history close, of domesticating it, of remembering 'what happened' in personal terms. As far as general culture goes, it indicates a turn towards histories 'from within' – a profuse, miniaturised, aestheticised, annualised, (feminized), pre-packaged and yet open vision of the past. Musical annuals record a relation between public and private, 'outer' and 'inner', past and present, society and self very particular to their time. They are among the first printed documents to register those cast-off, unsung,

disposable moments, which might, when drawn together, open a window on that most elusive, sought-after and human of histories: the history of sentiment.

## Bochsa in London

Music, like its sister arts, poetry and painting, is remarkable for the great variety of images with which it abounds.

Bochsa<sup>1</sup>

My favourite authors were Handel, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and my aim was to give dignity to harp playing.

Bochsa<sup>2</sup>

From the point of view of his critics, it was appropriate that the person most responsible for the 'act of profanation' of 22 June 1829, should be a convicted forger. Who else would disobey the authority of genius? Who else would 'impersonate' a Beethoven symphony in the language of the stage? That Bochsa ended up being portrayed in the late nineteenth century as an immoral character, that he seemed ignorant of the laws of 'intellectual property', as we have seen, obscures the 'normality' of what he achieved in his *Symphonie pastorale* (1829).

Bochsa's life and work has suffered a chequered musicological reception. Given his prominence in the nineteenth century, the lack of attention is probably due to the continuing currency of the idea of the morality of genius. 'In all concerns, literature and the arts, it seems now to be generally acknowledged', the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* wrote in the early 1820s, 'that to the influence of moral causes alone great excellence is to be attributed'.<sup>3</sup> Existing biographies of Bochsa's life vary considerably in the facts they select and in their placement of the composer in the history of music. As a result, the particulars of his fascinating life are sketchy, sources contradict, and accuracy hinges on the moral predilections of the writer. Even if one ignores modern reservations about biographical and historical reportage in general, the hazards of drawing up a 'true' and 'faithful' account of Bochsa's life are unusually treacherous. A legacy of the tendency to moralise, it is

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<sup>1</sup> In the commentary to Nicolas Bochsa, *The Bavarian, or Tyrolese Air; arranged for Harp, with an Introduction and Variations*, commentary by Charles Egan (London, 1823), quoted in *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 5 (1823), 543.

<sup>2</sup> See Nicolas Bochsa, *History of the Harp from Ancient Greece down to the Present Time* (New York, 1863).

<sup>3</sup> *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 5 (1823), 434.

also a legacy of the nineteenth-century propensity to allow the not-always-honourable species of the performer the freedom to supply material for his own biography.

In the harp world, Bochsa's opinion of himself as the 'father of the harp' remains intact. One of the most prolific writers for the instrument, the virtuoso probably worked closely with Sébastien Erard in Paris and London on the improvements made to the new, double-action instrument.<sup>4</sup> According to Temperley, the virtuoso's exploitation of the technical developments of the harp 'immensely expanded its expressive range'.<sup>5</sup> Bochsa organised concerts to show off the harp's new 'Sympathetic Metallic Basses', wrote a series of epoch-defining pedagogical works still in use today, and experimented with a range of harmonic effects some of which were thought impossible until recently.<sup>6</sup> Kathleen Moon attributes the popularity of the harp in the nineteenth century and its 'transform[ation] into a virtuoso instrument' entirely to Bochsa.<sup>7</sup> For many, such as Richard Davis, Bochsa is still 'the finest harpist of the nineteenth century' or, less effusively, 'a man of great musical talent – a big man, with great personal charisma'.<sup>8</sup> This opinion was echoed by many during Bochsa's twenty-two-year stay in London; early nineteenth-century sources repeatedly refer to the performer as 'the first harp-player in the world ... daily distinguish[ing] himself as a composer and master' or 'a man of extraordinary genius in every point connected with his art'.<sup>9</sup>

Four prominent biographies of Bochsa were issued during his lifetime. The first appeared in Alexandre Étienne Choron's and François Joseph Marie Fayelle's groundbreaking Dictionnaire historique des musiciens artistes et amateurs morts ou vivants (1809). The Dictionnaire's account of Bochsa's young life is curious for the prominence given to a set of harp variations, Fantasie militaire (1806), based on a

<sup>4</sup> The first British patent was filed in November 1794.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Temperley, '(Robert) Nicholas Charles Bochsa', Stanley Sadie, ed., The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 29 vols (London, 2001), III, 764–6.

<sup>6</sup> See Satu Salo, 'Wiederentdeckung von Bochsas "unmöglichen" Flageolets', in Harpa-Piano 2 (1997), translated at [www.odilia.ch/bochsa](http://www.odilia.ch/bochsa).

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Moon, 'Robert Nicolas Charles Bochsa (1780–1856): An Analysis of Selected Pedagogical Works for the Harp', Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1990), xiv.

<sup>8</sup> See Richard Davis, Anna Bishop: The Adventures of an Intrepid Prima Donna (Sydney, 1997). Quoted in Margaret Trail, 'Mourn Him, Mourn His Harp-Strings Broken!' The Celebrity Death of Nicholas 'Chevalier' Bochsa, unpublished paper given at The Culture and Imagery of Cities, VAD 4084, Leigh Astbury (1998), 5. A.V. Beedell, The Decline of the English Musician 1788–1888 (Oxford, 1992), 68.

<sup>9</sup> See The Musical Magazine 1 (1835), 162; and Richard Mackenzie Bacon, his signature collection, Cambridge University Library, Manuscripts Add. 6,245.

theme from Choron's own La Sentinelle. Bochsa, evidently, was well known to Choron and the compliment he paid to the biographer by using the theme in a recent composition probably coloured what was set down in the biography. In 1824, Bochsa apparently persuaded John Davis Sainsbury to publish a second prominent biography in an English 'Dictionary of Musicians' based on Choron's model. A box of manuscripts that turned up in Scotland in the 1930s indicated the extent of Bochsa's involvement in the project; he surreptitiously translated large sections of Choron's publication. (An 1825 reissue of the dictionary had to be made after charges of plagiarism were settled.) Predictably, no mention either of 'La Sentinelle' or the by now well-known allegations of Bochsa's forgeries were made in either of Sainsbury's editions.<sup>10</sup>

François-Joseph Fétis' Biographie universelle des musiciens (1835–44), while filling out Choron's and Sainsbury's depiction of Bochsa's family background and supplying a provisional list of works, was unable to provide detailed information about Bochsa's criminal activities beyond the vague mention of 'certain unlawful actions'. A year before Bochsa's death (1855), a fourth biography attributed to Henry C. Watson appeared in Australia. It is likely that the Philadelphia-based journalist (the first full-time music critic in America) had nothing to do with the publication, despite the appearance of his credentials ('from the Musical World, London') on the title page. Bochsa probably compiled the document himself, borrowing Watson's name to gain credibility for its contents.

François-Auguste-Arthur Pougin's 1871 supplement to Fétis' Biographie universelle, appearing some fifteen years after the harpist's death, was the first of its type to record that Bochsa was 'as distinguished an artist as he was miserable as a man'. Ironically, Pougin's supplement appeared in the same year in which court records that would prove the event of Bochsa's trial for forgery were destroyed during a fire in the repository of civil documents at the Hôtel de Ville in Paris (their duplicates at the Palais de Justice do not survive either). The sources that remain for piecing together the events of Bochsa's life before 1829 are a huge output of published compositions, and a mass of journal and newspaper reports largely

<sup>10</sup> In the 1930s, Henry George Farmer discovered, amongst a set of manuscripts in Scotland sent by various composers to Sainsbury for use in his dictionary, a small note apparently indicating Bochsa's involvement in its compilation. Documents from various composers, usually with embellished personal accounts of themselves, expose the tendencies of early nineteenth-century vanity publishing; see Henry George Farmer, 'British Musicians a Century Ago', Music and Letters 12/4 (1931), 384–92.



written by William Ayrton and Thomas Massa Alsager, two figures who, for various personal reasons, engaged in a vicious anti-Bochsa campaign shortly after the musician's arrival in London in 1817.

Patricia John's monograph, Bochsa and the Biographical Dictionaries of Music and Musicians (1990), makes a desperate attempt to clean up this soured historical image. The morality of the artist, apparently, is still a measure of his worth as a musician. Ever his apologist, she casts doubt on the truth of his trial in France, rubbishes his alleged involvement with a family of notorious London prostitutes, excuses his sordid portrayal in the English media, and attacks the integrity of his biographers in the nineteenth century. The 'father of the harp', the great pedagogue and teacher of John Chatterton (harpist to Queen Victoria) and Elias Parish Alvars (whom Berlioz considered 'the Liszt of the Harp') was surely not a criminal!

Bochsa was probably born twenty-three days after the storming of the Bastille, on 9 August 1789 in Montmédi, north-eastern France, not far from the Belgian border.<sup>11</sup> His father, Karl Bochsa (d. 1821) was a Czech oboist and composer, who settled for a job in the Lyon's Grand Theatre around the turn of the century. By 1801, the twelve-year-old 'Bochsa fils.' had already composed a symphony and the score for a ballet produced at the Lyon opera, La Dansomanie. Later that year, his father accepted a post in the Bordeaux opera orchestra, where the German-born composer Franz Beck accepted his son as a composition student. Nicolas Bochsa's first opera Le Retour de Trajan, ou, Rome triomphante (1805) necessitated a return to Lyon for a performance to honour the passage of Napoleon through the city on his way to Italy. According to Watson, Napoleon was so impressed by the work, shrewdly based on the conquests of a great Roman emperor, that he ordered the young composer sent to the Paris Conservatoire. Once there, Bochsa studied composition with Etienne-Nicolas Méhul, harmony with Charles-Simon Catel, and harp under François Joseph Naderman and Vicomte de Marin. His experience at the conservatoire terminated after three years under strained circumstances, despite him apparently winning prizes for harmony.<sup>12</sup> His ignominious departure was most likely a result of de Marin's leaving for England and an ensuing conflict with

<sup>11</sup> In 1855, Henry C. Watson claimed that Bochsa was born in Prague in 1791; see H. C. Watson, 'A Sketch in the Life of N.C. Bochsa', George G. Foster, ed., Biography of Anna Bishop (Sydney, 1855), 11–4. This is less likely, since a link with the French-Bohemian style of Gyrowetz or Wranitsky would have been advantageous to Bochsa's image, Bohemian composers apparently possessing a deep affinity with nature which made them consummate tone painters; see The Harmonicon 2 (1824), 201.

<sup>12</sup> Davis, Anna Bishop: The Adventures of an Intrepid Prima Donna, 26.

Naderman, whose style of playing had yet to embrace Érard's improvements to the harp. During his stay at the conservatoire, he composed an oratorio, Le Déluge universel (1806), for two orchestras and chorus – probably a musical realisation of Anne-Louis Girodet's painting, The Déluge (1806), which had caused a sensation at the Académie des Beaux-Arts.<sup>13</sup>

After only five or six years in Paris, Bochsa's fame as a harp virtuoso had superseded that of his rival and former teacher, Naderman. His emergence as the finest harpist in France is confirmed by the contents of an 19 October 1811 letter in the hand of the eminent educationalist and dilettante harpist Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis: 'Dans ce moment, on parle beaucoup de Bochra [sic], il est devenu grand travailleur; il a beaucoup de succès dans la société et beaucoup plus que Vaderman [sic]'.<sup>14</sup> On 3 September 1812, Bochsa, who according to Ayrton was 'of low birth and without education', married Georgette Ducrest, the musical daughter of a Marquis and the niece of the Royalist, De Genlis.<sup>15</sup> This wedding firmly established the musician in high society. Her ex-husband guillotined and her family impoverished by the effects of the Revolution, de Genlis organised her niece's engagement and wedding apparently to stave off an arranged marriage that Georgette's immediate family were forcing on her. Bochsa's glamour, charm, talent, handsome features and close ties with Paris' highest artistic circles made him the ideal candidate to seal Georgette's escape. A disciple of the educationalist philosophies of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, de Genlis also had contact at this time with the maître de ballet, Deshayes, who would later collaborate with Bochsa on his Symphonie pastorale (1829). Deshayes was attached to the Théâtre Italien in Paris in the first decade of the nineteenth century and taught de Genlis a pas seul which she frequently performed both on stage and in the salon.<sup>16</sup> Georgette, in her memoirs, which were published in English at the height of the Bochsa scandal in London, wrote that she had 'contracted

<sup>13</sup> Now in the Louvre, Paris. For more on Bochsa's oratorio (which was apparently Anglicised by Charles Didbin), see The Musical Times 39 (1 November 1898), 727. A manuscript copy of selections from the oratorio survives in the Boston Public Library.

<sup>14</sup> Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, Lettres Inédites de Mme de Genlis à son fils adoptif Casimir Baecker (1802–30) (Paris, 1902), 173. The errors are due to transcription inaccuracies by the editor. De Genlis' influential harp tutor, Nouvelle Méthode pour apprendre à jouer de la harpe (Duhan rpt. Geneva: Minkoff, 1974) probably supplied the model for Bochsa's later pedagogical works.

<sup>15</sup> Menutier Central, Paris, MC XIII, 558, see John, Bochsa and the Biographical Dictionaries of Music and Musicians, 24. For Ayrton's comments, see his letter to J.B. Mack, dated 28 November 1827, in the journalist's papers in The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 60,370/1,065e, 15.

<sup>16</sup> 'Deshaies taught me this dance, which I was continually asked to perform, not only on the stage but in the drawing-room'; see Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, Memoirs of the Countess de Genlis (London, 1826), 73.

a marriage which was calculated, as I thought, to secure my happiness. This illusion has been dispelled by the most fatal occurrences, and I have had to bewail my unhappy lot with tears of bitterness'.<sup>17</sup>

On Napoleon's 1813 return from his disastrous campaign in Russia, Bochsa was immediately appointed court harpist and composer, a post which probably involved giving lessons to the Empress Marie Louise and, if Watson is correct, the Empress Josephine (Napoleon's first wife). The appointment was short-lived. Under Napoleon, Bochsa only wrote one comic opera for the Théâtre Feydeau (later the Opéra Comique), L'héritier de Paimpol, which premiered on 29 December 1813. By March 1814, Napoleon's court had fled Paris after the Duke of Wellington's victory on the Iberian peninsula and the French defeat by the allied forces near Leipzig. Once the Russians had taken Paris, Bochsa hurriedly composed Les héritiers Michau, ou Le Moulin de Lieursaint for a performance at the Feydeau on 30 April 1814. The audience included the King of Prussia, Czar Alexander and the Austrian Emperor Franz I. It is likely that Bochsa also became acquainted with the Duke of Wellington and the young Lord Burghersh during their victorious stay in Paris in 1814. Probably claiming Bohemian nationality, Bochsa retained his position in the court of Louis XVIII at the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. He also became principal harpist at the court of Louis' nephew and close friend of George IV, the Duc de Berri. In the next three seasons, five comic operas by him appeared in the Feydeau, including the highly successful La Lettre de change (11 December 1815), which for twenty-one years was performed regularly in Paris and the provinces. By 1816, the opera made it as far a field as Brussels and Bern, and in 1819 was translated as a Singspiel (Der Wechselbrief) for a successful run in Vienna.<sup>18</sup> In London, an English translation under the title, The Promissory Note, premiered at the Lyceum Theatre on 29 June 1820, later productions being staged in Dublin, St Petersburg and New York. On 12 January 1816, at the re-interment of the remains of the beheaded Louis XIV (brother of Bochsa's employer) and as Commandant of Music to Les Mousquetaires noirs, Bochsa had the honour of providing processional music for the ceremony ending at the Basilique de Saint-Denis. The composer contributed an

<sup>17</sup> See Georgette Ducrest, Memoirs of the Empress Josephine, with Anecdotes of the Courts of Navarre and Malmaison (London, 1828), 164.

<sup>18</sup> See the Leipzig Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung 34 (1819), 271–2. Bochsa visited Vienna briefly in 1819 to supervise the production as well as to preside at the productions of his Un Mari pour éternelles (1816) and Le Roi et la ligne (1815) in March at the Leopoldstadt Theater.

immense fifteen movement Requiem, with processional accompaniments for wind band and percussion, which apparently influenced Hector Berlioz's Symphonie funebre et triomphale (1840) to the point of the later composer copying the titles of the outer movements: 'Marche funebre' and 'Recitative et Apotheose'.<sup>19</sup> At the end of September 1817, Bochsa spectacularly successful career at the centre of the rich cultural environment of the Bourbon Restoration and the vibrant diversity of Parisian comic opera ended. Without a word to either his wife or their two children, the harpist disappeared.<sup>20</sup>

In England, where forgery (along with housebreaking and sheep-stealing) was still a capital offence, Bochsa resurfaced again in public two years later (late 1818). Rekindling his concert career, Bochsa took rooms at 2 Bryanston Street, Portman Square, having naturalised by bigamously marrying Amy Wilson, the eldest daughter in a notorious family of London prostitutes. The wedding took place at St George the Martyr in London on 28 December 1818, as the registers of the institution show.<sup>21</sup> The musician quickly became the preferred harp teacher of young ladies in the most well-to-do of London families. Amongst his more prominent pupils were the Duchess of Wellington (separated from her husband) and the illegitimate daughters of the Duke of Clarence (the future King William IV), the Misses Fitzclarence. By 1820, the Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review, apparently overlooking the details of how Bochsa came to be in England, began

<sup>19</sup> See David Whitwell, 'A Possible Source for the Berlioz Symphony for the Band', The Instrumentalist 25/7 (1971), 37–8.

<sup>20</sup> De Genlis mentions a child (Coralie) in her memoirs; see Genlis, Memoirs of the Countess de Genlis, 20. A second daughter also appears in the picture; see Gabriel de Broglie, Madame de Genlis (Paris, 1985), 418. Marian Smith writes: 'No mere list of labels, however, can fairly convey the richness and variety of French comic operas, which formed a vital part of Parisian culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.... They reflected the heritage of a multitude of lively theatrical traditions, not the least of which were the earthy humour and biting social satire of the vaudevilles of the Fair Theatres, the slapstick of the commedia dell'arte, the witty repartee and word-play of Molière's comédie-ballets, and the sweetness of "larmoyant" sentimental comedies'; see Marian Smith, Opera and Ballet in the Age of Giselle (Princeton, 2000), 78.

<sup>21</sup> See the marriage register of St George the Martyr, Queen Square, microfilmed for the Guildhall Library, City of London. John James Du Bochet was a clockmaker from Bern in Switzerland, who settled at No. 2 Carrington Street in Mayfair around 1780. He had five daughters, Harriette, Fanny, Sophia, Juliet and his eldest, Amy, all of whom engaged in a 'family trade'. Before marrying Bochsa, Amy enjoyed the 'protection' of Count Palmella, who paid her monthly, ostensibly for the maintenance of their child, a boy. 'Mrs [Amy] Campbell [or Sydenham] was for some years the favourite sultana of his grace. Amy is certainly a woman of considerable talent; a good musician, as might have been expected from her attachment to the harpist, and an excellent linguist, speaking the French, Spanish, and Italian languages with the greatest fluency. In her person, she begins to exhibit the ravages of time, is somewhat embonpoint, with dark hair and fine eyes, but rather of the keen order of countenance than the agreeable; and report says, that Signor composer, amid his plurality of wives, never found a more difficult task to preserve the equilibrium of domestic harmony'; see B. Blackmantle, English Spy, 2 vols (London, 1825), II, 54.

issuing glowing reviews of his harp publications (for Goulding & Co.) and his public performances. (This was no doubt because William Horsley, who wrote the monthly 'Sketch of Music in London' series, was a friend of Bochsa, he having been the first of the signed witnesses at the harpist's most recent marriage.) A characteristic rondo showing similarity to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony called La Tempête (1818) was particularly successful in 1820. 'We can very inadequately express the impression made by his fire, force and feeling', the journal wrote of his performances at the time, 'by the power of his tone, the changeful variety of his manner, informed with sensibility that distaining controul [sic] flames forth in every note, by the brilliancy and the delicacy of his execution, and by the entire command of style he exhibits. He is received in London with enthusiasm'.<sup>22</sup>

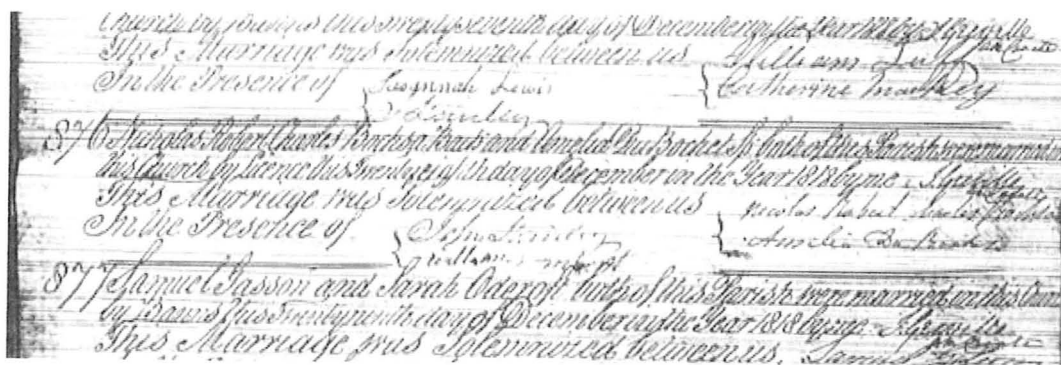


Plate 21. The December 1819 marriage register of St George's Holborn Queen Square, signed 'Amelia DuBouchet' and 'Nicolas Bochsa'.

The harpist's acquaintance with the Prince Regent meant that when the latter succeeded to the throne as George IV in 1820, Bochsa was invited to take part in a state visit to Ireland. On St Patrick's Day in Dublin, he performed for the court on a primitive harp reputed to have belonged to the eleventh-century king, Brian Boru.<sup>23</sup> On his return to London, Bochsa began to assume control of London's musical life. In 1820, Sir George Smart hired him to challenge François Dizi's twelve-harp extravaganzas at Covent Garden under Henry Bishop, by assembling a thirteen-harp orchestra at Drury Lane. In 1821, Bochsa replaced Bishop as the manager of the important Lenten Oratorio Series at Covent Garden. By 1822, apparently in an attempt (as the newspapers argued) to force a monopoly, he also entered into partnership with Smart as co-manager of Drury Lane's Oratorio Series (the

<sup>22</sup> *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 2 (1820), 379 and 226.

<sup>23</sup> The harp is now housed in Trinity College, Dublin.



proprietor being Robert Elliston). Diluting the religious tone of the season, Le Déluge universel (1806), now in an arrangement for soloists, chorus, double orchestra and twelve harps, appeared at Drury Lane in 1822 alongside a concert realisation of Rossini's La donna del lago to words by Sir Walter Scott. Meanwhile at Covent Garden, Rossini's Mosè in Egitto was performed in the form of an oratorio. This production heralded Bochsa's first contract at the King's Theatre in 1822, when the Rossini's 'oratorio' was retransformed into an opera minus its sacred libretto. The result, Pietro l'eremita (1822), was a triumph, John Ebers (the manager of the Italian Opera from 1821 to 1827) recalling in his memoirs that 'no opera brought out during my management had such equivocal success'.<sup>24</sup> Bochsa's only English opera, A Tale of Other Times or Which is the Bride, the music written in collaboration with Thomas Simpson Cooke (no relation of the actor), also appeared in 1822 at Drury Lane. In the commentaries to his signature collection now in the Cambridge University Library, Richard Mackenzie Bacon recorded a remarkable instance of Bochsa's skill at adapting Rossini. Wishing to perform the overture to La gazza ladra at Drury Lane and not being able to procure a score, Bochsa attended a performance of Rossini's drama at the King's Theatre. After two hearings (the overture was encored), Bochsa presented the complete orchestral score to Smart the following morning 'which in the end', as Bacon put it, 'proved to be a more correct one than that of the composer himself'.<sup>25</sup>

Bochsa's energy was boundless in 1822. Some time previously, he had approached Lord Burghersh (the future Earl of Westmorland and amateur musician) for his support in the establishment of an academy of music along the lines of the Conservatoire in Paris. 'He ... persuaded an amiable nobleman', William Ayrton wrote in a letter now in The British Library, 'that an academy of music after the French model would add to our national glory, and that he was the fittest man in the world to manage an establishment for the education of both sexes'.<sup>26</sup> The result of the harpist's efforts was the establishment of the Royal Academy of Music in 1822, with William Crotch as Principal and Bochsa as General Secretary and Professor of Harp. At least half of the intake for the first year of the Academy's life in 1823 signed up as harp students, the virtuoso donating harps and music to the cause (Ayrton suspected

<sup>24</sup> See Ebers, Seven Years of the King's Theatre, 157–9.

<sup>25</sup> Cambridge University Library, Manuscripts Add. 6,245, fol. 17.

<sup>26</sup> See The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 60,370/1,065e.

they were 'abstracted from some ladies'). Bochsa pledged an annual endowment.<sup>27</sup> His involvement in the Academy, predictably, has been downplayed in the several histories of the institution.

Despite his extraordinary skills and relative success, Bochsa was steadily coming under fire in the press. Unconfirmed reports of his criminal activities in France were beginning to filter across the channel. Increasingly, his less-than-decorous character was being associated with the less-than-original style of composition. Causing further consternation was his management of both winter patent theatres (specifically licensed for English opera), and his appointment to the only existing English music academy (despite a weak grasp of the native language). One of the more powerful members of the media, William Ayrton of The Morning Chronicle (1813–26), The Harmonicon (1823–33) and The Examiner (1837–51), had particular cause for jealousy. Since the establishment of the Philharmonic Society in 1813, Ayrton, J.P. Salomon and other prominent members of the Board had been trying to start a music academy of their own.<sup>28</sup> Bochsa high-society connections had effectively put paid to the Philharmonic's dream. Apart from his last stint at the King's Theatre in 1825 (he had others in 1817 and 1821), Ayrton was effectively condemned by Bochsa to a life away from music in the mundane world of the media.

He is already regarded with envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, by a good many folks who ought to have better feelings.

The London Magazine<sup>29</sup>

I must tell you now of the operations of a journalist, a Mr William Ayrton, who, to judge by his work, had less of human kindness in his disposition than he had of bitter expression.

George Alexander MacFarren<sup>30</sup>

According to Bacon, the first knowledge of Bochsa's criminality was spread soon after his arrival in London. During a provincial tour with the pianists, Frédéric Kalkbrenner and Lucy Anderson, in 'a large town' (probably Bath), a member of the party apparently came across a local news reprint of an article from a French journal offering a reward for Bochsa's arrest. When the reprint was shown to Bochsa, Bacon

<sup>27</sup> For the Academy's harp students see The Harmonicon 1 (1823), 52.

<sup>28</sup> See British Library Manuscripts Add. 41,771, ff. 6–7.

<sup>29</sup> The London Magazine 6 (1822), 573.

<sup>30</sup> MacFarren, Addresses and Lectures, 157. Sir George became Principal of the Royal Academy and Professor of Music at Cambridge in 1875. For more on the Ayrton-Bochsa relationship, see page 230.

writes, the harpist 'fell senseless on the floor'.<sup>31</sup> By 1822, Ayrton was aware of Bochsa's past, though, strangely, the harpist was still tolerated at every level of London society. On 23 February 1822, a caustic review of Le Déluge universel appearing in the Morning Chronicle announced 'Bochsa ... whose letter of introduction to the British public is not a Moniteur for 1817, but a new work of his own composition'. 'One chorus, "The Wicked at their Orgies", excited our attention', the article continued, 'for we had heard it as being curiously descriptive; but we could not make out the nature of the wickedness intended to be described, and whether the unhappy beings were swindlers, or forgers, or bigamists [although there was] undeniable evidence of their being great sinners in harmony'.<sup>32</sup> The references to shameful acts induced the Frenchman to write a letter (now in The British Library) to Ayrton on the day of the report demanding to know whether 'the notice which appears in [the Morning Chronicle] at this Day, is correctly ascribed to him or not?'.<sup>33</sup> Ayrton denied involvement, but a feud had been sparked.

When Ayrton launched The Harmonicon in 1823, Bochsa quickly recognised the danger both to himself and his fledgling Royal Academy of Music. Before long, he had become the anonymous proprietor of a short-lived rival to Ayrton's journal, The Monthly Magazine of Music. 'We are determined to vindicate the rights of Truth wherever they are infringed', the magazine's first number announced, 'and opinions delivered in this spirit must ultimately prevail, becoming like the holy ashes of Licinium, which no wind could blow away'.<sup>34</sup> In the spirit of Licinium, the first issue vehemently defended Le Déluge as Bochsa's 'coup-d'essai ... the fire and animation ... communicat[ing] a pleasing change to the dull round of sloth and monotony by which our musical drama is infested', and argued against claims put forward in the September and December issues of Bacon's London Magazine that Bochsa's appointment to the academy was disgraceful.<sup>35</sup> The Monthly Magazine, however, folded after only one issue, when, according to a report in the obscure The Journal of Music and Drama, the editor (whose identity is unknown) resigned after Bochsa

<sup>31</sup> Richard Mackenzie Bacon, his signature collection, Cambridge University Library, Manuscripts Add. 6,245, fol. 17.

<sup>32</sup> The Morning Chronicle, 23 February 1822.

<sup>33</sup> See Ayrton Papers, The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 52,337A, ff. 1–2.

<sup>34</sup> A reference to the fourth-century martyrdom in Sebaste of a party of soldiers under Licinius, a subject popularised by Spontini's La Vestale (1807). The ashes of these martyrs were distributed as Christian relics, inspiring the founding of numerous churches.

<sup>35</sup> The Monthly Magazine of Music 1/1 (1823), 29 and 22.

altered sections of the first issue's biographical memoir, which was devoted to Bishop, the proprietor's friend and fellow composer.<sup>36</sup>



Plate 22. Robert Cruikshank, 'The Cyprian's Ball at the Argyle Rooms', in Bernard Blackmantle, *The English Spy*, 2 vols (London, 1825), II, 49. Blackmantle was a pseudonym for the blackmailer Charles Molloy Westmacott. Bochsa plays the harp alongside the bassist Dragonetti, Amy seated with her legs crossed below to the right attended by the Milanese ambassador. Harriette wears the plumed turban just to her left, in the concert room on Regent Street adorned with life-size mythological figures.

After the failure of the oratorio concerts and his struggles with the Academy and *Monthly Magazine*, Bochsa was declared bankrupt on 4 May 1824.<sup>37</sup> His creditors having to be made satisfied with only 7d. in the pound, and having incurred the debt of Mayhew (his attorney), Bochsa started a subsidiary music dealership in the Argyll Harmonic Saloon in Regent Street, probably after an appeal to the King. The Regent's or Royal Harmonic Institution, with which the harpist linked, had strong associations not only with the monarchy, but with Beethoven, having issued an authorised version of his 'Hammerklavier' Sonata (op. 106) in

<sup>36</sup> No copy *The Journal of Music and Drama* seems to have survived; see Langley, 'The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century', 516.

<sup>37</sup> The *London Magazine* was surprised at Bochsa's failure in the oratorio series, since this had been outwardly successful, enjoyable and much improved. The writer suggested that the 'want of success' was due to the 'superabundant' salaries of the singers engaged: 'The abandonment of the Oratorios by Sir George Smart, and Mr Bishop, and the ruin they entailed upon their latest proprietor, Mr Bochsa, might well seem to cast doubt upon the continuation of this popular species of entertainment'; see *The London Magazine* (March 1825), 462.

1819.<sup>38</sup> Slowly rebuilding his career after bankruptcy, Bochsa rubbed salt into particularly Ayrton's wounds in 1826 when he was appointed, again on the personal recommendation of George IV, to the music directorship of the King's Theatre. Effectively, he replaced Ayrton, who having already directed the 1817 and 1821 seasons, was appointed to his last directorship of the Italian Opera in early 1825. Velluti, who was supposed to have succeeded the journalist to the post, found that his position had been usurped whilst he was still under contract.<sup>39</sup> The Age found the indignant letters the castrato sent to the press amusing: 'the only difference we can see between Bochsa and Velluti, is, that, the former is a family man, with one or two wives, and the latter has no family at all!'<sup>40</sup>

Just as Bochsa's coup at the opera house seemed imminent, a series of anonymous letters appeared in The Harmonicon and The Examiner, signed only by 'The Detector' or 'X'.<sup>41</sup> 'The Detector's' contribution to the December issue of The Harmonicon was prefaced by Emilia's position on Iago.

The world's abused by a most notorious knave,  
A base notorious knave, a scurvy fellow-  
O put in every hand a whip  
To lash the naked rascal through the world.<sup>42</sup>

Between 1824 and 1828, 'The Detector' and 'X' penned various items relating to Bochsa's underhand dealings in France and England. Bizarrely, they seldom referred openly to his forgeries, possibly for fear of court proceedings. 'A condemned, a notorious, an incorrigible felon', 'The Detector' wrote in 1826, 'one of the most unrepenting villains that ever escaped execution'.<sup>43</sup> Whilst the harpist's skill in arranging music for ensemble had been a huge benefit to the early years of the Royal

<sup>38</sup> Humphries and Smith list Bochsa & Co. as having offices at 258 Regent Street, while the Regent's Harmonic Institution was at 246 Regent Street, also in the Argyll Rooms; see Charles Humphries and William Smith, Music Publishing in the British Isles (Oxford, 1970), 78. The title page on Bochsa's arrangement of Weber's overture to Oberon (1825) for harp (shelfmark g.1098.r in The British Library) confirms Bochsa's involvement with the firm.

<sup>39</sup> See Velluti's letters in The Harmonicon 3 (1825), 236. It seems Velluti, thought by many to be the last great castrati, and his successor Carlo Coccia eventually shared the post with Bochsa, who concentrated on the music for the ballet.

<sup>40</sup> The Age 27 (13 November 1825), 213c.

<sup>41</sup> See The Harmonicon 2 (1824), 102; 3 (1825), 70, 222; 4 (1826), 9, 30, 64, 69, 186; 5 (1827), 3-4, 18, 111, 123-4. For 'X', see, for example, The Examiner 984 (20 December 1826), 787.

<sup>42</sup> The Harmonicon 3 (1825), 222.

<sup>43</sup> The Harmonicon 4 (1826), 186. Langley speculates that Alsager contributed the material signed 'X' in The Examiner. Fenner has argued against this, noting that Alsager's attitude to Il crociato, for example, did not match the opinion of 'X'; see Theodore Fenner, Opera in London: Views of the Press 1785-1830 (Carbondale, 1994), 35.



Academy, both anonymous accusers agreed that his appointment was a threat to young and ill-formed musical minds. 'It is ... said', 'The Detector' added in 1826, 'that the females are placed within reach of contamination from a profligate bigamist, the felon husband of a common cast-off woman'.<sup>44</sup> One such female in peril, was the young Anna Rivière, who, according to Moon, accepted Bochsà at around this time as her vocal coach.<sup>45</sup> 'X' at the *Examiner*, meanwhile, attacked the musician's borrowing habits when he reviewed *La Temple de la concorde*, a ballet that appeared at the King's Theatre in 1826: 'The music is quite trumpery enough for him to have all the merit of it, but we cannot but remark, that he [the composer] coolly puts his name to a variety of pieces manifestly selected from other authors. He seems not to forget his old habits, and has yet a hankering after the property of others'.<sup>46</sup>

A newspaper reprint in the *Times* of 6 December 1826 (of an extract from the *Le Moniteur universel* of 19 February 1818) confirmed the worst.<sup>47</sup> Suspected of forgery in his dealings with a banker (Lafitte), placed under surveillance by the French authorities, and expecting an imminent arrest, Bochsà failed to appear on stage at a concert in Paris in September 1817. It turned out that while his audience awaited him in the concert room, he had 'raided the cloakroom, stealing the most expensive furs and jewelled wraps to stow in the waiting carriage, along with the entire night's takings, wrested from the concert manager', fled to Calais and then Dover.<sup>48</sup> On 19 February 1818, Bochsà was tried *absente reo* by the Cour d'Assises in Paris for eight counts of forgery, mostly involving bonds or promissory notes to the value of 760,000 francs. The Duke of Wellington, the Feydeau, and the composers Méhul, Boieldieu, Berton and Isouard were among the claimants. Bochsà was found guilty on all charges, and was sentenced to twelve years of forced labour, branding

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>45</sup> See Moon, 'Robert Nicolas Charles Bochsà (1780–1856): An Analysis of Selected Pedagogical Works for the Harp', 56.

<sup>46</sup> *The Examiner* 940 (12 February 1826).

<sup>47</sup> John has found identical notices of the trial in the *Gazette de Paris* and the *Journal de Paris*, which confirm that the case took place; see John, *Bochsà and the Biographical Dictionaries of Music and Musicians*, 22. For the reprint, see *The Times* 13,142 (6 December 1826).

<sup>48</sup> Davis, *Anna Bishop: The Adventures of an Intrepid Prima Donna*, 30. This story is based entirely on 'The Detector's' account, though Ayrton's reports certainly distort the facts. In a letter to J[ames].B. Mack[intosh] in 1827, he retells the 'Detector's' tale of Bochsà's stealing from his audience, though this time he relates it to Bochsà's first concert after getting married to Ducrest! See The Ayrton Papers, The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 60,370/ 1,065e. Ayrton also writes (this seems far-fetched) that Bochsà stole the cabriolet and horse from the driver in order to leave Paris. Lafitte is only mentioned in Ayrton's account, though his participation in the scheme seems plausible. That Ayrton was also not immune to corruption is confirmed by the existence of a bribery note in the Puttick and Simpson sale catalogue of his musical library (1858); see Langley, 'The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century', 398.

with the letters 'T. F.' (travaux forces) on the forehead, a fine of 4,000 francs, and, according to 'The Detector', the pillory.

Backed by the Royal Academy in 1826, Bochsa retaliated. He began by suing two London newspapers (The Sunday Monitor and The Examiner) for defamation. 'X' in the last of these had gone too far in calling him 'Beelzubub, the prince of devils' in an issue of 19 February.<sup>49</sup> During the second of these actions, against the editor of the Monitor (its 19 and 26 February prints under scrutiny) his lawyers ascribed the public attacks to xenophobia: the feeling was that he was 'encouraging the native talent of English youth in the imitation of these exotic accomplishments, [a shameful thing if you consider music's] 'tendency to break down the manly vigour of British character'.<sup>50</sup> Many journals, such as the Brighton Gazette, backed the harpist: 'it is, we think, not difficult to perceive that the attacks upon him may be traced to professional rivalry and envy'.<sup>51</sup> The verdicts came quickly: in both cases, the jury found in Bochsa's favour (this induced much consternation as to the efficacy of the law of libel and its threat to the freedom of the press). But since the trial had proved rather than disproved his guilt, Bochsa was suspended from his post as General Secretary of the Academy for nine months. He was finally disbarred from any contact with the institution on 26 April 1827.<sup>52</sup>

During the legal wrangling, Bochsa turned his attention to the King's Theatre, composing no less than four ballets in the 1826 season, and one in 1827.<sup>53</sup> 'With becoming modesty', as 'X' put it, he also launched a private 'Academy of Music and Morals' chiefly devoted to harp instruction.<sup>54</sup> By 1829, Bochsa was, as the Morning Chronicle noted facetiously, the undisputed 'Great Director of the whole of the Opera'. He had assumed full directorship, in other words, of both opera and ballet at the King's Theatre.<sup>55</sup> His 1826 successes more than compensated for his disappointments at the Academy, and led to the appearance of Masaniello, Les Déguisements imprévus, Symphonie pastorale and his first Italian opera for over a

<sup>49</sup> See reports on this case in The Age (10 December 1826), 658b.

<sup>50</sup> See a record of proceedings in The Morning Chronicle 17,853 (4 December 1826), 4a.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in The Morning Chronicle 17,864 (16 December 1826), 3a.

<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately for the Academy, their troubles did not end here. Dr Crotch was forced to resign in 1831 'by the guardians of morality' after congratulating a lady student 'as an old gentleman might; with a chaste kiss'; see Cyril Ehrlich, The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century, A Social History (Oxford, 1985), 82.

<sup>53</sup> See Ivor Guest, The Romantic Ballet in England, 157.

<sup>54</sup> See The Examiner 984 (10 December 1826), 787.

<sup>55</sup> See The Morning Chronicle (26 January 1829).

decade, *I Messicani* (1829).<sup>56</sup> Various embroiled in scandals relating to the employment of his wife, Amy Wilson, as 'translatress of opera', and the farming out of his ex-students to provincial concerts against the wishes of Rev. F. Hamilton, the superintendent of the Royal Academy, Bochsa attracted most attention in 1829 for a high-profile contractual dispute with the orchestra of the Italian Opera early in January.<sup>57</sup> Wanting to put an end to last minute cancellations, and the practice of members replacing themselves with deputies immediately before performances, Bochsa forced a new, more binding contract on individual members of the orchestra. A party of at least twelve rebelled, circulating a pamphlet to strengthen their claims. Bochsa was eventually obliged to dismiss and replace them with a group of Frenchmen he once had ties with in Paris, including such talents as Jean-Louis Tolou, Anton Bohrer and Scipion Rousselot. 'The well-trained and established players had revolted against M. Bochsa's direction', Rev. John Cox remembered through the mists of Victorian morality in 1872, 'and were superseded by a set of incompetents, who, whatever their individual talent might have been, were prevented from displaying it through the miserable ignorance of the harpist – or 'harpy' – musical director, who not only could not read a score, but was totally ignorant of the smallest characteristics of his important office'.<sup>58</sup> *The Atlas* went to town on the issue: 'The Methodists say that all playhouses are under the especial patronage and protection of the Devil.... What a state of ecstasy must he now be in with M. Laporte and Mr Bochsa, who have boldly "let slip the dogs of war" – the first, in railing off half the pit for guinea seats; the second, in not engaging the old band!'<sup>59</sup> A later issue that year satirised Ayrton's hatred of the harpist by printing a piece entitled 'The Dream

<sup>56</sup> According to reviews, little of the music of the *I Messicani* could safely be attributed to the composer. One newspaper wrote of the opera: 'Let [composers] steal the brooms ready-made: let them not give us a handle of Rossini's rosewood, a twig of Spohr's laurel, a branch of Beethoven's cypress, for brooms so ill-assorted will prove bosoms of destruction, and sweep the public from the house.... To robbery we are not so prudish to object, but robbery and murder, as heard in *I Messicani*, exceeded our liberal toleration'; see *The Spectator* 39 (28 March 1829). Another wrote: 'The music of *I Messicani*, or *The Mexicans*, is taken from Spohr, Pacini, Donizetti, Beethoven, etc; as odd a concoction of names as though we should hear of poetry by Shakespeare and Muggins. Something Mr Bochsa should have extracted from Schwindl – for no one understands the compositions of schwindl better than he'; see *The Atlas* IV/149 (29 March 1829), 194a.

<sup>57</sup> For more on the orchestral dispute, see Frederick Corder, *A History of the Royal Academy of Music from 1822 to 1922* (London, 1922), 36. *The Times* sniffed at the skills of Bochsa's wife by extracting a appeal made in *The Athenaeum*: 'The initiatory attempt of Amy's must end, we should think, to undeceive them if they do; for in the *traduction* (an admirable word) of Meyerbeer's *Margherita d'Anjou*, we scarcely know which savours most strongly the ridiculous – the utter ignorance displayed of the original Italian, or the execrable stupidity of the equally original English'; see *The Times* 13,497 (24 January 1828), 2e.

<sup>58</sup> John Edmund Cox, *Musical Recollections of the Last Half-Century*, 2 vols (London, 1872), II, 173.

<sup>59</sup> *The Atlas* IV/141 (25 January 1829), 57.

of a Dilettante' in obvious reference to 'The Diary of Dilettante', which appeared monthly in The Harmonicon. This time, the writer equated Bochsa directly with Satan, who while dancing a waltz from Der Freischütz is attacked by Dragonetti with his double bass, and dumped in a sack over Westminster Bridge by James Mackintosh (the theatre's ex-bassoonist).<sup>60</sup>

Bochsa's fortunes failed for good on 6 February 1830 when the Argyll Rooms went up in flames. Having lost money owed to him when John Ebers (the manager of the King's Theatre) went bankrupt in 1827, the failure of a series of musical and theatrical speculations in 1829 at Bath, Bristol and Brighton did not help. Fortune returned briefly with the help of the father of a singing pupil and wine merchant, Edmund Bellchambers; a replacement music selling business on Regent Street opened only a month after the calamity at the Argyll Rooms. But his partnership in this venture with Frances Levy was ill-advised. The extent of Bochsa's debts revealed, Levy turned on him and shut him away in the family jail: 'W. Levy's senior's lock up house in Newman Street'. Bochsa was formally committed to a more official establishment, the King's Bench (Debtor's) Prison, on 25 October 1830. He owed the impressive sum of £2,203.3.10 to more than a dozen individuals, ranging from his hairdresser to the harp manufacturer James Delveau to the violinist Nicholas Mori. His music dealership was finally gazetted bankrupt on 25 February 1831.<sup>61</sup> To make matters worse, his name also appeared in the latest 1831 edition of Harriette Wilson's scandalous memoirs. Popular enough to have induced at least thirty-five reprints in its first year alone (1825), the continually expanding and now eight-volume edition listed Bochsa alongside some of Harriette's more familiar clients, including the Duke of Wellington, Byron and George IV. The 'fat gentleman of genius' was portrayed somewhat cruelly as short-sighted to the point of blindness; in one particularly titillating scene in volume five, he encountered Amy in the bedroom, 'equipped for conquest, in a beautiful, laced night-cap, avec des rubans, du couleur de rose'.<sup>62</sup> Bochsa's appearance in the 1831 edition probably signalled a separation from Amy, his second wife. John dismisses Bochsa's involvement with the

<sup>60</sup> The Atlas IV/179 (18 October 1829), 680c.

<sup>61</sup> The Times 14,473 (26 November 1831) and The London Gazette 18,779 (25 February 1831), 382. Bankruptcy was filed at the Gray's Coffee House on 21 February 1831; see Public Records Office B3/696. By 1830, a low-lying Bochsa was probably using 1 Little Ormond Street, Queen's Square as his base, having also signed up to Anna Rivière's 'Academy of Italian, Spanish and French Singing'; see The Times 14,220 (7 May 1830), 5b.

<sup>62</sup> Harriette Wilson, The Memoires of Harriette Wilson Written by Herself, 8 vols (London, 1831), 5, 213.

family of courtesans entirely, writing that 'the story was a disconnected mass of confused scatological prattle, treated as a merry romp'.<sup>63</sup> But, given the existence of his record of marriage, there can be little doubt that the man was infamous for good reason.

Perhaps because he spent so much time in prison, Bochsa retreated from public life in the 1830s. He set up a concert management scheme with the violinist, Nicolas Mori, and made provincial tours with consistent success. In 1834, a fantastic sketch for harp entitled Panorama Musical underlined the regard Bochsa had shown for the Pastoral Symphony in 1829, when it borrowed a 'specimen' from Beethoven's first movement as part of his description of 'the various styles of music from the year 1500, down to the present times'. On 2 May 1835, with the intervention of Lord Burghersh (John Fane), Bochsa's estate was finally declared in credit.<sup>64</sup>

By the end of a quiet decade, the harpist was ready for new challenges. In August 1839, his reputation in tatters, Bochsa finally departed England in style by eloping with Anna Bishop née Rivière, the famous cantatrice and wife of Sir Henry Bishop of the Concerts of Antient [sic] Music. The scandal shook the musical establishment, and the newspapers were flooded with accounts of their escape. Anna left behind three children (Rose, Auguste and Louise) to follow the convicted forger on wildly popular concert tours to Ireland, most of Europe, Russia, North and South America and finally Australia.

The accounts of their travels across the world border on the unbelievable, and include an audience with the Pope in 1844, private concerts for Prince Metternich, appearances at Vienna's Kärntnertortheater and Redoutensaal in 1842, and a two-year stint at the San Carlo Theatre in Naples with Mercadante in 1845, which was marked by a vicious feud with Giuseppe Verdi.<sup>65</sup> Bochsa's dramatic

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<sup>63</sup> John, Bochsa and the Biographical Dictionaries of Music and Musicians, 24. Bochsa's involvement with the Wilsons, as we have seen, is undeniable. Ayrton made routine reference to 'some notorious Cyprian, some cast-off demirep' around 1825 in his reports of Bochsa; see, for example, The Harmonicon 4 (1826), 159.

<sup>64</sup> See Public Record Office B3/696. The documents relating to Bochsa's bankruptcy provide valuable information about the life of a musician in London. Bochsa's file includes a detailed list of annual expenditure and debts from 1824.

<sup>65</sup> Anna's success in Naples led Saverio Mercadante, for one, to write (apparently with some advice from Bochsa) his Il Vascello di Gama (1845) for her. On the back of her popularity, the manager at San Carlo, Vincenzo Flauto commissioned Verdi, in January 1845, to write Alzira (1845) for Anna as well. Late in June, Verdi was in the audience to witness the first Neapolitan production of his I due Foscari (1844) with Anna in the lead. Bochsa was conducting. Verdi's insistence that his beloved Eugenia Tadolini rehearse for the premiere of Alzira on 12 August 1845 led to a feud, Verdi opening the exchange by accusing Anna of bribing the press to write negative reports of his work. The following



concerts always retained their cross-arts character, Anna usually appearing in concert dress to sing semi-staged arias while Bochsa conducted. In Vienna, the couple's Redoutensaal concert on 17 April 1842 concluded with a massive tone-painting by Bochsa entitled The Descriptive Power of Music (1842) for double orchestra, choir, two piano accordions, and a speaker reciting parts from William Collins' obscure ode The Passions. The speaker on this occasion was none other than Wagner's sister-in-law, Amelie Planer. In April 1855, to cite another example of the visual character of Bochsa's concerts, the harpist presided at the San Franciscan premiere of Haydn's The Creation. This performance featured 'a moving panorama expressly painted for the occasion and representing the six days of Creation', which shifted, fitfully, behind the performers.<sup>66</sup>

After a prolonged and painful illness, Bochsa died in Sydney on 6 January 1856. He was carried to his grave in lavish ceremony to the strains of the funeral march from the Eroica by his beloved Beethoven, and a second Requiem adapted from sketches he had made on his deathbed à la Mozart. The quintessential figure of French-bohemian exoticism, Bochsa was later immortalised, legend has it, as the hypnotic Svengali, in George du Maurier's classic novel, Trilby (1894).

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four performances with Tadolini at the San Carlo were complete disasters, a result no doubt of Bochsa stocking the audience with claquers. Verdi left Naples later that month in defeat; see Davis, Anna Bishop: The Adventures of an Intrepid Prima Donna, 102.

<sup>66</sup> See *Ibid.*, 175.

## The Skeleton Lover!

The only sense we have of how Fitzball's The Flying Dutchman; or the Phantom Ship (Adelphi, 1826) sounded – given the paucity of evidence – is preserved in George Rodwell's manuscript orchestral parts for Richard Peake's The Skeleton Lover! A Romantic Musical Entertainment in 2 Acts Founded on A Black Letter Tract 'The Condign Punishment of a Transylvanian Necromancer'. These can be found in The British Library.<sup>1</sup> Another gothic piece, it was premiered by the English National Opera (who despite their name performed melodramas) at the Adelphi on 17 July 1830. Their home venue, the Lyceum, had burnt down earlier that year, forcing them to hire the Adelphi over the summer (when the theatre was dark). The management obliged them to employ resident musicians. In 1830, violinist William Wagstaff led the orchestra, having taken over from William H. Callcott at the end of the 1829 season. Strongly related to the Dutchman, the melodrama told the story of a 500-year-old Count Rudolph (played by 'Obi' Smith), just arrived in Leipzig. He must win the love of his chosen virgin, Constance, in order to endure another century of living in human form by day, skeleton by night. Like Vanderdecken, he has the musical power of seducing maidens, as demonstrated in the Act One dénouement.

This section, in fact, is a good example of the period's use of sound and music: dialogue alternating with solo songs, offstage choruses, repeated scored fragments, a clock striking and longer sequences. For ease of reading, I have arranged the small but colourful band (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, C horn, C trumpet, trombone, timpani and string section) for keyboard. The numbers beside each 'melo' indicate where players should turn to in their scores (melos could recur at any time in the drama). This climax is remarkable for the way it features shouting over the top of the orchestra (the practice of speaking over music only became conventional in melodrama after 1860). The vocal parts for the 'Chorus of Invisible

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<sup>1</sup> The materials have been somewhat dispersed. For the incomplete vocal parts, see The British Library Manuscripts Add. 33,810. For the orchestral parts, including doodles by the oboist of characters onstage, see Add. 33,814. For the libretto of the Skeleton Lover, see Lord Chamberlain's Plays 39, The British Library, Manuscripts Add. 42,903.

Beings' are lost, and Constance's aria, not reproduced here owing to its length, is a typically simple, nostalgic strophic song. During the scene, the Count takes exception to the spying habits of his valet, Hans Bobbs:

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Example 6: The end of Act One, The Skeleton Lover!

**Rudolph**

*(aside)*

Her thoughts are upon Ebert, nay then I must exert my  
supernatural influence ...

*Rudolph waves his Hand, the Melody commences – Constance under  
the spell of fascination*

**Melo 12**

*A wild symphony*



**Rudolph**

*(speaks [recitative]).*

'Balmy Zephyrs, hither waft  
Perfume from the Almond Tree  
Softest Music float around  
Twin her thoughts from all but me'

**Soft chorus of Invisible Beings**

**Air, Constance**

*(sings)*

Hark I hear in distance sweet ... etc.  
Can it be that this is Love ...

**Rudolph** (catching Constance in his embrace).  
 Lovely Maiden accept the devoted homage of an adoring  
 Lover.

*A loud smash in the Closet.*

**Constance** That Noise!

**Melo 13** *Rudolph approaches the Closet and drags forth Hans Bobbs*

*Allo agitato*

The musical score for Melo 13 is written for piano in common time (C). It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 1-3) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a half note in the bass staff. The second system (measures 4-5) includes a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking. The third system (measures 6-8) features a forte (*f*) dynamic in measure 6 and a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic in measure 8. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

**Rudolph** Wretched slave, what dost thou here?

**Hans Bobbs** Oh noble Count.

**Rudolph** Art prying again.

**Hans Bobbs** No, no. Anything but that. Intercede for me sweet young Lady.  
 I, I, I ... what shall I say? I had a fancy to peep at the Baroness'  
 Potsdam China having heard a deal about it.

**Rudolph** A feeble and ill-imagined lie. Nay, for I know thee well. Go thou  
 shalt now, and trouble me no more.

**Melo 13 repeated** *Rudolph lifts Hans Bobbs with a powerful grasp [and] puts him  
 outside the window.*

# Melo 14

The musical score for Melo 14 consists of four systems of piano and vocal staves. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The first system shows a vocal line with eighth notes and a piano accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. The second system features a vocal line with eighth notes and a piano accompaniment with chords and eighth notes, marked with dynamics *ff*, *rf*, *rf*, and *ff*. The third system shows a vocal line with eighth notes and a piano accompaniment with chords and eighth notes, marked with *dim.* and *m*. The fourth system shows a vocal line with eighth notes and a piano accompaniment with chords and eighth notes, marked with *pp* and *ppp*.

## Constance

(Re-enter ... she calls)

Clotilda, help, Clotilda (*sees Rudolph on the couch*). Ha, the Count reclining. He surely must be worse. Approaches. Lifts the mantle when, instead of Rudolph's face the skull and upper part of the skeleton visible, Constance shrieks wildly and throws the drapery over it again, falls into Clotilda's arms, who rushes on at the moment and bears her out at the door. The door is then violently closed and locked.

END OF ACT



## The Genealogy of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*

And still in the storm, as sailors say,  
Sere and wan and white as a bone,  
The phantom ship drives against the gale  
And an old man stands on her poop alone.  
Unknown, recalled by Lawrence Green<sup>1</sup>

I could have sworn I seed the top of Table Mountain; but now the  
weather's got so hazy and so dark, one can scarcely see a cable's  
length from the bows.

Tom Willis, a sailor in Fitzball's *Flying Dutchman*<sup>2</sup>

South Africans may (or may not) be pleased to hear that, if Wagner had got it right, he would have set his *Der fliegende Holländer* in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> The question of the true source of the legend, as we shall see, is no small matter given Wagner's aesthetic outlook. What is more or less certain, though, is that the story of the spectral ship originated around 1641, when a certain Hendrick van der Decken (this is the legend) swore to round the Cape of Good Hope though it take him until Doomsday. Since then, sightings of his ghostly vessel have been frequently made: the young King George V, for example, recorded seeing 'a strange red light' on 11 July 1881, when he was midshipman on the HMS *Bacchante* – 'a phantom ship, all aglow in the midst of which light the mast, spars and sails of a brig two hundred yards distant stood out in strong relief as she came up'. In 1823, just before the story found resonance in anti-emigration circles in London, Captain Owen of the HMS *Leven* reported a sighting.<sup>4</sup> Some say, that even today, if you are lucky, you may catch a glimpse of van der

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence G. Green, *Tavern of the Seas* (Cape Town, 1975), 149.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', *Cumberland's Minor Theatre II* (London, 1829?), 16.

<sup>3</sup> Apologies to John Deathridge: he begins his 1982 article on the *Dutchman*: 'Scotsmen may (or may not) be pleased to hear that Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* was originally set in Scotland'; see John Deathridge, 'An Introduction to *The Flying Dutchman*', Nicholas John, ed., *Der fliegende Holländer/The Flying Dutchman*. ENO Opera Guide 12 (London, 1982), 13–26.

<sup>4</sup> Green, *Tavern of the Seas*, 149.

Decken's unfortunate brig off the Cape of Storms raging against the south-easter in full rigging.

The question of how Wagner came upon the myth of the Flying Dutchman rests on the truth of the following sequence of events. Having arrived in London on the 6 April 1827, a young Düsseldorf poet, Heinrich, cashed two bank drafts in the name of his uncle, the banker Salomon Heine. The transaction honoured, he accepted an invitation to dine at the home of the cashier, Baron James de Rothschild. On the following evening, at around 11 p.m., he probably joined his host in a box at the Adelphi Theatre.<sup>5</sup> The afterpiece was about to begin. Attendance at the minor theatre on the Strand as part of after-dinner entertainments was routine for both London's Regency bucks and visiting foreigners. The idea (even Peter Brooks argues this) that the *haute ton* avoided the amusements of the minors in contrast to their worship of the boulevard theatres in Paris is unfounded.<sup>6</sup> In the late 1820s, the Adelphi was a fashionable, if infamous, place of upper-class resort. 'People of fashion, we suspect, prefer visiting a minor establishment like [the Adelphi]', the *New Monthly Magazine* reported in 1826, 'because they go decidedly for a frolic, or in the spirit of contradiction [since they] cannot be confounded with their inferiors'.<sup>7</sup> It is plausible, furthermore, that Heinrich recommended the late-night theatre trip. As it happened, he had shown a passing interest in the subject of that night's melodrama in the third volume of *Reisebilder*, a work published in Hamburg on the day he left for England.<sup>8</sup> He could hardly have missed the playbills; his lodgings at 32 Craven Street were only three blocks from the insalubrious theatre on the Strand. We can imagine the scene: the audience and Rothschild's party taking their seats, the green curtain lifting

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<sup>5</sup> According to Heine's brother, Maximilian, Heinrich received £100 from his mother, not to pay for his keep in London, but as a roundabout way of introducing himself to the Rothschilds. Five credit-letters were required for this purpose (four more drafts were drawn on 19 April, 11 May and 16 May). Heinrich's cashing of the cheques went against his uncle's wishes, since they were not meant for his financial support. This was why, on his return to Hamburg later that summer, Heinrich had to patch things up with his family; see Ellis, 'From Fitzball to Wagner. A Flying Dutchman Fallacy', 15. Ellis makes an exhaustive argument against the possibility of Heine having seen the melodrama, only to prove that there was one particular night when it was likely.

<sup>6</sup> Evidence presented to the Parliamentary Committee on Dramatic Entertainment in 1832 makes this clear; see *Reports from the Committees* 7 (London: House of Commons, 1832), and the comparison with Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* 18/63 (March 1826), 104.

<sup>8</sup> Whilst visiting the island of Norderney in 1826, Heine had written: 'I often walk alone on the beach, thinking over these marvellous sea-legends. The most attractive of them all is that of the Flying Dutchman, who is seen in a storm with all sail set, and who occasionally sends out a boat to ships, giving them letters to carry home, but which no one can deliver, as they are all addressed to persons long since dead'; see Heine, 'Pictures of Travel', 234.

to Rodwell's overture of the season's final performance of The Flying Dutchman; or, the Phantom Ship, the stage set in South Africa.

Is this fanciful? Of course Heine may never have been to the Adelphi. But circumstances and a quizzical episode in his 'Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski' in Der Salon (1833) make it likely.<sup>9</sup> That the poet referred to 'poor Vanderdecken' in The French Stage (1837) – Fitzball's name for the mariner – strengthens the possibility.<sup>10</sup> Was Heine's scattered recollection of that night blurred by his notoriously impenetrable style? Or was Schnabelewopski's vagueness more a matter of his encounter with a strange, cleft-lipped prostitute in the second scene of the melodrama? Heine's text, after all, did not concern itself with the legend *per se*; the Dutchman myth merely provided a pretext for describing how the protagonist lost his prejudice against blondes:

You certainly know the fable of the Flying Dutchman. It is the story of an enchanted ship which can never arrive in port, and which since time immemorial has been sailing about at sea ... how terrible the life must be of one condemned to endure unheard-of tortures on a wild waste of waters – how his body itself is his living coffin, wherein his soul is terribly imprisoned ... how his agony is as deep as the sea on which he sails – his ship without anchor, and his heart without hope.<sup>11</sup>

Heine's narrator was particularly impressed by a scene in the melodrama, which would be key in Wagner's opera. Both the poet and Fitzball emphasized on an episode where a young heroine contemplates an old painted portrait of the Dutchman. In the melodrama, Lestelle's fascination (she is the equivalent of Heine's Katherine and Wagner's Senta) induces her to take up a lute and sing: 'Return, O my love, and we'll never, never part'. The ballad, she explains to her attendant, was taught her by her mother: it was the song of Vanderdecken's bride. As Lestelle breaks into her second verse, the ghostly Dutchman materialises: rising undetected though a sea chest on stage right, listening mournfully to her and weeping silently.<sup>12</sup> For Heine, this scene of incantation was the best of the story, since at that moment an orange peel fell from the gallery and landed on Schnabelewopski's head. Looking up, the narrator spied an admittedly less edifying version of the woman-saviour now

<sup>9</sup> Heinrich Heine, 'From the Memoirs of Herr Von Schnabelewopski', The Works of Heinrich Heine, trans. Charles Godfrey Leland, 12 vols (London, 1891), 130–6.

<sup>10</sup> Heine, 'The French Stage', 280.

<sup>11</sup> Heine, 'From the Memoirs of Herr Von Schnabelewopski', 130–3.

<sup>12</sup> Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', 24.

before him on stage: 'A white, soft tender creature, a wonderfully womanly tender being, not languishing, yet delicately clear as crystal, a form of home-like propriety [*Ein Bild häuslicher Zucht*]'.<sup>13</sup> The *Adelphi* was notorious for the illicit dealings of its front or orange woman, and it seems Heine may have accepted one such fruitful solicitation, since, not much later in the story, Schnabelewopski is wildly kissing a 'Dutch blonde' on a black sofa. The dishevelled narrator re-enters the theatre some time later, the play already deep into its denouement.

Heine's pseudo-autobiographical account of the legend, its amoral tone aside, appealed to Wagner. Both artists had occasion to feel they had experienced the myth first-hand: Schnabelewopski whilst making a journey from Hamburg to Amsterdam (Heine remembered 'the joyous, long-drawn Ho-i-ho! of the sailors', as in the *Holländer's* sailors' chorus);<sup>14</sup> Wagner whilst he and his wife were on board the *Thetis*, making the voyage from Pilau via Copenhagen to London in 1839. 'I will never forget that journey', Wagner wrote just before the premiere of *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843), 'it lasted three and a half weeks and was filled with accidents. Three times we suffered from the most violent storms, and once the captain was constrained to sail into a Norwegian harbour. The journey through the Norwegian fjords made a marvellous impression on my imagination; the legend of the Flying Dutchman, confirmed by oral reports of the sailors, attained for me a particular and characteristic colour, which only the adventure I had experienced at sea could give it'.<sup>15</sup> Heine, of course, was also influential:

The 'Flying Dutchman', whose intimate acquaintance I had made upon the ocean, had never ceased to fascinate my phantasy; I had also made the acquaintance of H. Heine's remarkable version of this legend in a number of his 'Salon'; and it was especially his treatment of the redemption of this Ahasuerus of the seas – borrowed from a Dutch play under the same title – that placed within my hands all the material for turning the legend into an opera-subject. I obtained the consent of Heine himself.<sup>16</sup>

(The Dutch play referred to by Wagner – as we have seen – was probably Fitzball's, since Heine had never been to Amsterdam).

<sup>13</sup> Heine, 'From the Memoirs of Herr Von Schnabelewopski', 133.

<sup>14</sup> Heine even imagined sighting the vessel: 'Once by night I saw a great ship with out-spread, blood-red sails go by, so that it seemed like a dark giant in a scarlet cloak'; see *Ibid.*, 125 and 130.

<sup>15</sup> The pair had fled across the East Prussian border in July 1839 without passes; see Arthur Groos, 'Back to the Future: Hermeneutic Fantasies in *Der fliegende Holländer*', *19th-Century Music* 19/2 (1995), 191–211, 191.

<sup>16</sup> Wagner, *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, 17.

For Heine, as for Wagner, the character of the Dutchman was not so much a man-monster to be feared, as an anti-hero to be identified with. The figure of the lonely traveller, the journeyman, the solitary quester, resonated powerfully with the emerging Romantic ideal of the wanderer. Both artists had reason to feel exiled, out of place, drawn to the fate of this 'Wandering Jew of the Seas'. Heine made his position clear in 1837:

Ah! I have lived for a long time now in foreign lands, and it often seems to me that with my fable-fancied home-sickness, I am like the Flying Dutchman and his shipmates, who were long racked on the cold waves, and yearned, and all in vain, for the quiet quays, tulips, myfrows [sic], clay pipes, and porcelain cups of Holland.<sup>17</sup>

Wagner's feelings of alienation were no less acute. In his A Communication to My Friends (1851), he recalled:

It was the feeling of utter homelessness in Paris that awoke in me a longing for my German homeland. Yet this longing was not directed toward some old familiar thing that was to be regained; rather, its object was something new, as yet unknown, which I intuitively desired, but of which I only knew one thing for sure: that I would certainly never find it here in Paris. It was the longing of my Flying Dutchman for a woman ... the redeeming woman whose features I beheld as yet only indistinctly, but which hovered before me only as the feminine element in general. And now this element expressed itself to me in terms of the homeland [Heimat], that is to say, the sensation of being embraced by some intimately familiar community [Allgemeinen], although a community I did not truly know, but only longed for, as the realization of the idea of a 'homeland'.<sup>18</sup>

According to his own testimony, then, it was in Der fliegende Holländer that Wagner found his ultimate woman – his 'woman of the future' as he called her. Before returning to Dresden to stage the work in April 1842, the composer had spent a failed two and a half years as a hack writer and music arranger in Paris. In fact, he had first tried to land his Dutchman, at the Opéra in the summer of 1840. Despite Meyerbeer's intervention, however, his proposals failed. The upshot was that the composer found himself selling his one-act outline to Léon Pillet (the director of the Opéra) for 500 francs, in a deal that paved the way for the appearance of Pierre-Louis Dietsch's Le Vaisseau fantôme of 1842. But all was not lost. Wagner looked back on this period of his life knowing that a bride-to-be was waiting for him – a musical language for

<sup>17</sup> Heine, 'The French Stage', 280.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Thomas Grey, 'The Return of the Prodigal Son: Wagner and Der fliegende Holländer', Grey, ed., Richard Wagner: 'Der fliegende Holländer' (Cambridge, 2000), 1–24, 10.



which he had always been perfectly and absolutely predestined. Just as in the second act of his opera, salvation was to be found in pure feminine form.

On 2 January 1843, on the date his Holländer premiered, Wagner finally returned to 'the maternal bosom of German music', as Thomas Grey has called it.<sup>19</sup> His departure from the French capital, as far as his later autobiographical writings were concerned, represented an end to his overseas toils, to his floundering on foreign waters. An authentic ground had been reached, upon which the great steeples of Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Tristan und Isolde, Der Ring des Nibelungen, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg and Parsifal could be built. For the composer, the Holländer represented a home-coming, a work of redemption. Through this purer distillation of the once parochial German Schaueroper (Weber, Marschner and Spohr had provided the prototype), a Heimat, a Promised Land, had been attained.

If the Holländer was semi-autobiographical, then Senta's ballad (the song of the heroine) did nothing less than bring the composer to aesthetic life. In his Communication to My Friends (1851), Wagner emphasised the centrality of her song in Act Two:

[It was] the thematic seed of all the music in the opera: it was the poetically condensed image of the whole drama, as it was in my mind's eye; and when I had to find a title for the finished work, I was strongly tempted to call it a 'dramatic ballad'. When I came eventually to the composition, the thematic image I had already perceived quite involuntarily spread out over the entire drama in a complete, unbroken web; all that was left for me to do was to allow the various thematic germs contained in the ballad to develop to the full, each in its own direction, and all the principle features of the text were arrayed before me in specific thematic shapes of their own making.<sup>20</sup>

Wagner's description of the song as a musical 'condensation' of the whole does not bear scrutiny in the score, as Dahlhaus has shown. (The three musical themes of the ballad only recur in the Dutchman's monologue, Erik's account of the dream, in sections of the Dutchman/Senta duet and the final apotheosis.)<sup>21</sup> That the ballad involved the first forays into dense leitmotivic composition of the type Wagner claims is equally tendentious. What is clear, however, is that this scene was

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Stewart Spencer, 'Some notes on Der fliegende Holländer', Wagner III/2 (1982), 78–86, 84.

<sup>21</sup> 'It is in fact a major exaggeration, or even a mistake, to speak of the 'thematic image' of Senta's ballad spreading out 'over the entire drama'; see Carl Dahlhaus, Richard Wagner's Music Dramas, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge, 1979), 18.

key to Wagner's later self-imaginings. His public lauding of the ballad notwithstanding, the composer intended to retouch its music as late as 1878: Cosima noted in her diary of that year that her husband found the 'lively, popular idiom' used at the beginning of Senta's song to be 'out of character with the rest of the work'.<sup>22</sup> The composer wanted to revisit the ballad in the same way he had the opera's conclusion in 1860, when Senta's 'suicide' was recomposed in view of the chromatic transfiguration given to Isolde at the end of *Tristan*. Far from spawning the opera, as Wagner imagined, this mythic oral ballad required retroactive retouching, so as to better fulfil the composer's fantasy of his own artistic evolution.

The delusion Wagner perpetuated, in other words, was that his operatic narration of the Dutchman myth was the organic outgrowth of Senta's musical recitation in Act Two. That the central character of the legend should appear to the heroine while she is recalling him in song (as originally presented in Fitzball's play) is significant. It was as if the ancient melody were summoning him into existence – just as Elsa would do later with Lohengrin in the narration of her dream. Heine had already suggested that the story of the Dutchman was not so much to be told, as to be sung (and by women at that):

And when I closed my eyes [he is on board a ship] I could see her [his great-aunt] before me, as she twitched her lips and told the legend of the Flying Dutchman. I should have been glad to see some mermaids, such as sit on white rocks and comb their sea-green hair; but I only heard them singing.<sup>23</sup>

In both the melodrama and the opera, it is a woman's musical ballad that brings the myth to life. Each drama features a pivotal scene where, as the heroine sings, the ghostly Dutchman appears to her. The narrative takes shape as it had for at least two centuries, only now the song was no longer the yarn of a sailor, but the lullaby of a woman.

The conceit here was, of course, heavily nationalistic. In *A Communication to My Friends* (1851), Wagner himself declared that it was through this opera that he found his 'mother tongue'. It was here that his Natural Past spoke to him for the first time; he saw 'through music's eye', as he put it: hence the preponderance of folk melody, the 'free' construction of numbers, and so on. As we have seen, Wagner claimed that the work was not composed consciously: an intuitive, involuntary

<sup>22</sup> Spencer, 'Some notes on Der fliegende Holländer'

<sup>23</sup> Heine, 'From the Memoirs of Herr Von Schnabelewopski', 129.

'desire' had taken hold of him; as though the material had been snatched from the mythic jaws of folk history. Another section in A Communication claimed:

The figure of the Flying Dutchman is a mythical creation [Gedicht] of the people: it gives emotionally compelling expression to a timeless feature of human nature. This feature, in its most general sense, is a longing for peace from the storms of life.

Like his exiled Dutchman, Wagner's searching and wandering had drawn events to a natural destination. An as-yet-ill-formed past and inevitable future had always been leading him on. This is why Senta sings of a telos in the opera, of salvation, but only in a narrative that withholds closure, that is always unfolding. Wagner's music (or so the composer declared) was in every sense the authentic expression of a national soul arching towards the harmony of its womanly home. To Ferdinand Heine, in early August 1843, he wrote:

The legend of the Dutchman, filled as it is with the pounding of the sea, now took hold of me.... I allowed the whole aura of the legend to spread unchecked over the entire piece.... From the outset I had to abandon the modern arrangement of dividing the work into arias, duets, finales, etc., and instead relate the legend in a single breath, just as a good poem should be.... It is unlike anything we now understand by the term opera.... We Germans are inspired to write by our innate sense of poetry.... We may yet regain an original German opera and all who lose heart and who turn in their despair to foreign models may learn from my Dutchman example.<sup>24</sup>

Geographical questions, therefore, were at the heart of the Dutchman aesthetic. Distracted as Schnabelewopski was, Heine's recollection of the location of Fitzball's melodrama was drifting and sketchy. Barely worth recalling, or perhaps obscured by the theatrical lighting, was the Act Two backcloth of Table Bay: 'Some cape or other (the name of which escapes me)'. It may have been because Captain Peppercoal, the father of the heroine, wore a 'cassimire [sic] waistcoat and breeches [with] striped silk stockings' in Fitzball's play.<sup>25</sup> But Heine mistook him for a Scot [a 'Scottish nobleman'], and the rocky landscapes and castle scenes for Scotland.<sup>26</sup> Wagner followed suit: and the manuscript drafts of the Holländer (now in the Bayreuth archives) show he originally imbued his opera with an ambiance Ecossaise.

<sup>24</sup> Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington, ed., Selected Letters of Richard Wagner (New York and London, 1988), 114–5.

<sup>25</sup> Fitzball, 'The Flying Dutchman; or The Phantom Ship', 7.

<sup>26</sup> Heine, 'From the Memoirs of Herr Von Schnabelewopski', 141.

Only a few days before the 1843 Dresden premiere, Wagner recognised the autobiographical potential of the story, and landed his Dutchman closer to home: Norway. Looking back on life, he increasingly saw himself identifying the true Nordic seed of his Artwork of the Future in this work. Already in February 1842, a few weeks after the premiere, he began to re-imagine some suitable bloodline for the fable (sections of his Autobiographische Skizze began to appear in the Zeitung für die elegante Welt). Since then, every production of the opera has commemorated Wagner's artistic development, his personal voyage. Why else would the concern for the birthplace, for the purity of the legend be so fundamental? Issues of genesis, stock, lineage and descent – the struggle over 'who got to the legend first', the problem of the myth's origin, have in fact dominated criticism of the opera since 1843. Musicologists, even today, preoccupy themselves with detailed genealogical surveys and argue over issues of location, place and situation: which versions of the story was Wagner exposed to? Where do the characters derive from? Who had influence? What is the true myth?<sup>27</sup> Given these obsessions, Fitzball's Dutchman is a liability, important precisely because it threatens the purity of Wagner's ideal. In the late nineteenth century, William Ashton Ellis suffered the typical reaction when he encountered the English prototype in The British Museum:

If the authorities at that august institution allowed such treatment of their treasures, I must say that I should have flung the volume with considerable violence upon the floor, as soon as opened; for it contains about the most utter trash I have ever had the misfortune to look at.<sup>28</sup>

The degree of revulsion shown towards Fitzball's text is revealing. Der fliegende Holländer is probably descended from a minor creation that is more exotic than tragic, outward rather than inward, popular rather than serious, melodramatic rather than operatic, theatrical rather than poetic. And if the whole pre-Victorian malarkey were not enough, the authentic home of the Dutchman myth is not to be found on the sublime wastes of Norway or even Scotland. Better to look south: off the shore of an antipodean colony somewhere in Africa.

<sup>27</sup> A few examples not already mentioned include Barry Millington, 'The Flying Dutchman, Le Vaisseau fantôme, and other Nautical Yarns', The Musical Times 127/1,717 (1986), 131–5. and Bernd Laroche, Der fliegende Holländer. Wirkung und Wandlung eines Motivs Heinrich Heine – Richard Wagner – Edward Fitzball – Paul Foucher und Henry Revoil/Pierre-Louis Dietsch, Europäische Hochschulschriften 95 (Frankfurt, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, 'From Fitzball to Wagner. A Flying Dutchman Fallacy', 5.

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